

The Supremacy of Jesus Christ

Colossians: An Introduction

I. Why Colossians?

- A. Colossians gives us a breathtaking picture of who Jesus Christ is.
- B. Colossians teaches what it means to be “in Christ”.
- C. Colossians shows how faith transforms everyday life.
- D. Colossians will open our eyes to false substitutes for Jesus Christ.
- E. Intellectually rich yet connected to joyful living in Jesus Christ.
- F. #1 To bring us all back to the centrality of Jesus.

- 1. Illustration—*Jesus Revolution*

II. Background and context.

- A. Colossae—A city in the Lycus Valley near Laodicea (Modern day turkey).
 - 1. Destroyed by earthquake shortly after the letter was written.
 - 2. Populated mostly by gentiles with an estimated 50,000 Jews.
- B. Paul wrote the letter from prison in Rome approx.. 61 AD.
 - 1. Colossians is one of four of the “Prison Letters”.
- C. Epaphras most likely the founder/pastor of the church at Colossae.
- D. Paul had never been to Colossae, he did not plant the church.
- E. The “Colossian Heresy”—Assorted philosophies crept into the church.
 - 1. Humanism.
 - 2. Legalism.
 - 3. Mysticism.
 - 4. Asceticism

I. Introduction from the text (1:1-14).

- A. The letter followed the norm for early 1st century letter writing.

- B. Paul established his authority in writing the letter—"An apostle" (V.1).
- C. Recipients—The "saints" and brothers in Christ in Colossae—"Holy ones" (V.2).
- D. Paul's priority in prayer (V. 3).
- E. Paul is "thankful" (V.3):
 - 1. For their faith in Christ (V.4).
 - 2. For their love for each other in the church (V.4).
- F. Their faith resulted from their "hope" in the gospel (V.5).
 - 1. Paul's favorite trio—Faith, hope and love (1st Corinthians 13:13).
- G. The gospel is spreading throughout the world (Vs 6-8).
 - 1. Resulting in fruit.
 - 2. Multiplying saints.
 - a. Hear—understand—embrace—abide in Christ—Fruit.
- H. Paul prays they will be filled with the full knowledge of the will of God (V.9).
 - 1. Filled—completely and fully controlled by.
 - 2. Process:
 - a. Through spiritual wisdom
 - b. Understanding.
 - 3. Purpose(s) (Vs.10-11).
 - a. A worthy walk
 - b. A fruitful life
 - c. Increasing in the knowledge of God
 - d. Strengthened with all power
 - e. For the attaining of steadfastness, patience and joy

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For those of you who went through our Holy Spirit series... some of you commented to me last week that surely there is more important things you (me) could include in the series... that's true... there is... the study of the Holy Spirit is inexhaustible...

Realize this... the Holy Spirit is throughout the Bible... I hope that the portions we did look at helps you to see Him in every book of the Bible you study... I hope you can't read the Bible without seeing the work of the Holy Spirit!

This morning we will begin going through the book of Colossians which should take us to December for the Christmas break... this morning is introductory which is necessary... we need some background and some reasons for spending time in this great epistle... but I'm always anxious to get into the meat the book

From the very first chapter of Colossians to the very last... the Holy Spirit is a one of three main players... we will see the Holy Spirit in action... yet, He is not the primary focus of Colossians... and that is the way it should be... remember last week I said that the Holy Spirit's ministry is to glorify, elevate, reveal, Jesus Christ... I think there is no place in the Bible that is as evident of that mission than here in Colossians.

All of life boils down to Jesus Christ

Last Saturday I was warming up a pot of Beef bone broth... I was going to have a routine medical procedure that limited my diet for a few days to bone broth... Bone broth looks like a bowl of dirty water...

I put a pot of it on the stove to warm up... I forgot it... it all evaporated away... You wouldn't think you could burn bone broth! All that was left were some granules of beef... there really is something in bone broth!...

Wendy's Hamburgers has been searching for the beef since 1984... "Where's the Beef?" well, I found it... right there in that pot of evaporated beef bone broth!

I had been reading through Colossians which is why I forgot the broth on the stove...

When you really get into God's word... everything you do, the world around you becomes relevant in your study... I immediately made the connection between the bone broth and Colossians.

When you boil down Colossians... there's much in Colossians... but when it is distilled to the bare essence... what you have is Jesus Christ... only Jesus!... Colossians is all about Jesus as

beef is to bone broth... not the greatest analogy but that's where my mind went when I saw the substance of brown powder.

My goal this morning is to answer the question “**Why did I choose Colossians?**”...there are 66 books in the Bible... *Why did I choose Colossians?*... also... we need some **background of Colossians**... who is this letter written to and why... **what are the circumstances in Colossae** that spurred the apostle Paul to sit down and write this letter?... **what will it mean for us**... today nearly 2000 years after it was written?

If I can do that this morning... next week we will be getting to the beef... One of my favorite passages in the Bible... verses 15-29 (I might be a little optimistic with 14 verses!)

Let's pray to begin this series

Lord we pray in advance for great outcomes as a result of spending time in Your Word... this book of Colossians... we pray for what will be for some a renewed passion for Jesus Christ... and for others perhaps for the first time a passion and zeal for our Lord and Savior.

Reveal Your truth to us...open our eyes, ears and hearts to Your Word this morning... change us... sustain us in Your Word... form us into a people that glorifies you in our lives...Amen.

Before I go any further... to really grasp this book, let me challenge you to do something for the next two months... when I was in seminary... going through *An Introduction to the New Testament* class... whatever book we were going through, we were required to read that book every day for as long as we were in that book...

When you do that... you really get to know that book... Every day you will see things you never saw before... the words... the truth begins to really stick... So I challenge you to read the entire book of Colossians every day... try it for a month or better the entire two months... it's only four chapters... it should take only 10- 15 minutes or so... I guarantee results!!

Why did I choose Colossians?... and let me add to that... why should you now choose it also. I'll save my number one reason for last... not that it is number one because it is more important than the other reasons... but because it was the main reason I decided on Colossians.

2. Like no other book in the Bible... **Colossians gives us a breathtaking picture of who Jesus Christ is**... we will that immediately next week... Jesus is **the image of the invisible God... the creator!**...and the one I love... **He is the One who holds ALL things together... he is the head of the church**

3. **Colossians teaches what it means to be “in Christ”**... we say those two words all the time... “In Christ”... what does that mean?... so over and over Colossians connects our identity, our salvation and our new life to our union with Jesus.... It moves us from just knowing facts about Jesus to truly understanding how life changes because of and through Him.

4. **Colossians shows how faith...** true faith... **transforms everyday life...** Colossians is set up much like the book of Ephesians... the first half of the book is doctrine... Doctrine is the worldview by which we govern our lives... Our worldview is God's world view... His truth... God's doctrine... so the first half of Colossians reveals God's truth as it relates to our lives... Chapters 1 and 2.... The last two chapters is practical application... how we are to play out this truth through our lives...

Putting sin to death... developing a Christlike character... forgiving others... living wisely... handling relationships... just plain letting Jesus shape our everyday decisions that form our lives.

5. **Colossians will open our eyes to false substitutes for Jesus Christ...** and teach us how to resist these substitutes... there are no reasons for us to have any substitutes for Jesus Christ... the central message in Colossians is that *believers have been given fullness in Christ...*

Stop and think of how valuable that is... being full in Jesus Christ... fullness in Christ eliminates any questions about the meaning of life... why am I here? what am I to do in life... Where I am going... no substitute for security in life... how to grow spiritually...

6. I love Colossians because it is **intellectually rich yet connected to joyful living in Jesus Christ...** Intellectually rich does not mean hard to understand... it means it begins in our minds by educating us who Jesus is, what He did and what He does and what He will do...

Paul begins there but takes us to how we apply that to our lives resulting in a joy and peace that surpasses all understanding... It connects WHAT WE BELIEVE ABOUT CHRIST to HOW WE LIVE IN CHRIST.

So... **what was the initial reason I chose Colossians?**

1. **To bring us all back to the centrality of Jesus...** I need to explain this... I've been wrestling with this for a long time... many years... I see the Christian Church (capital "C" Church... with exceptions... in fact, there are some really great bright spots in the Christian world... churches that are centered in truth... but overall, I think the "Big C" church is a very distracted Church.

Many things have crept in... have infiltrated the Church which has distracted it from its primary purpose for existence... Instead of being centered on the gospel of Jesus Christ other things have come in and moved Him off center...

I have come to the realization that the Church spends an inordinate amount of time arguing with itself... arguing about doctrinal differences... usually secondary doctrines... lifestyle issues... what we can and shouldn't do... a form of legalism... how we should look and how we shouldn't look... centered on "social" and or "political" issues...

How to live "right"... "How to look right"... "How worship right"... Should we be political or apolitical?... should we take over the country and make it a Christian nation... even though

nations can't be Christian?...much of the "Church" spends much time, resources and efforts on all this stuff.

The world watches us... doesn't embarrass you?...It does me.

I have spent an inordinate amount of time debating, discussing, arguing, sometimes being yelled at over differing views of election and predestination... free will or theistic determinism... Individuals have left the church because I haven't made those issues my main issues from the pulpit...

I think it's much simpler than many make it... *Are you a Christian?...YES...Great, you are predestined and elected to be conformed to the image of his Son,...* Next!...the way I see it there is little value in trying to convince a non-believer the doctrine of predestination and election...especially when I believe it is a bit of a mystery anyway... I spend too much time in that debate... it comes to me....

Arguments about what we should and shouldn't do when it comes to what a worship service SHOULD look and be like...now people shop for churches like they shop for clothes or choose a restaurant...

*What style of music do you call your worship music?... How long do you preach?...*I've been asked *what do I wear on Sunday mornings when I preach?...*All the vital questions for choosing a church!... My observation is that many things have pushed Jesus Christ out of being the centrality of the church....many things have been added to the equation.

Many of you have seen the movie "*Jesus Revolution*"... It is an extremely accurate movie about the Jesus movement of the late sixties and seventies... I know it is accurate because I was there... literally...One of the main characters in the movie ...his best friend married my girlfriend... stole her away!...Hallelujah!

Basically, the movie is the story of Greg Laurie and Chuck Smith and the founding of the Calvary Chapel movement...the largest "non-denomination" denomination in the world...

It's the story basically of hippies finding Jesus...The "Jesus Freaks" The hippie movement was an "anti-establishment" movement... anything of the establishment was rejected... government, work, education, cultural norms...war ...organized ***religion***.

People looked good on Sunday... went to beautiful church buildings...did the right things on Sunday...very pious... Monday through Friday maybe not... Hippies were a mess... but they brought to light much of the hypocrisy and contradictions of the day...

I wanted to be a hippie, but my parents said "no"!

As the movie depicts... many of these hippies found Jesus... an anti-establishment Jesus... a non institutional Jesus... **JUST JESUS**... a Jesus that surpassed looking good when you go to church on Sunday... A Jesus that taught love your neighbors and enemies... I'm not saying they got it all right... I am saying they revealed at that time things that had crept in the church that had taken eyes off of Jesus.

A well know pastor today... was one of those hippies that came to Christ in that tent back in the early 70's... his name is Skip Heitzig, now pastor of Calvary Chapel Albuquerque New Mexico... our paths crossed back in the day.

He tells the story of shortly after becoming a Christian in one of the tent meetings, in his late teens, early twenties... He felt led to become a pastor and start a church... the way you became a Calvary Chapel pastor in that day was to listen to all the Chuck Smith Cassette messages on tape... so he moved from Orange County California to Albuquerque... Bible in hand... And started a very humble church... no seminary training... no idea what "infralapsarian", sublapsarian and supralapsarian is... all he knew and was passionate about was Jesus.

A newspaper reporter did an article on this new church founded by Skip... it told of its humble existence... in a rented space... coffee cans for offering plates... I think they even had bean bags for chairs... this reporter's conclusion meant to be critical was.... *All this church has is Jesus*...

Skip's response to this reporter, which has been criticized by many was ***All we need is Jesus***... Colossians is a book bringing us back to the centrality of Jesus Christ... it is a declaration of the supremacy and sufficiency of Jesus Christ...

It was written to bring a people that had strayed to get back to that centrality... it was written to us to make sure Jesus is front and center of our very existence as a church and as individual children of God.... this is a vital, very important book of the Bible... that is why I chose it.

A little background and context... Verse 2 tells us this is a letter addressed to the church in Colossae... Colossae was... "was"—it is no longer there or anywhere... it is a mound of dirt in modern Turkey... Colossae was a city situated along a trade route in the Lycus Valley...

You might remember when we went through Revelation, we began looking at the seven churches... they were all on a major trade route... we talked about the church at Laodicea... Colossae was in that neighborhood... it was located about 100 miles from Ephesus.

The reason it is a mound of dirt today is because it was destroyed by a massive earthquake shortly after this letter was written and received... Colossians was written in about 61 AD... Colossae was inhabited mainly by gentiles, but historians tell us there were as many as 50,000 Jews... so it was a fairly sizable in its day.

Some quick facts about this letter:

Paul wrote this letter to the church in Colossae from prison in Rome... The apostle was in what we would more accurately call house arrest... he had rented a house, and because of his beliefs in Jesus Christ had been arrested, chained to a guard in his house and was not allowed to leave... but he had some freedom to write letters...

We know these letters as Paul's "prison letter's written over the two years he was imprisoned... Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon are all known as Paul's prison letters... all written between 60-62 AD...

[We're introduced to a guy named Epaphras in verse 7... Bible names are interesting... we discussed this in college group last Thursday... we all get hung up in name pronunciation in the Bible... we're afraid we'll show our ignorance if we mispronounce a name... the truth is... many names in the Bible NO ONE knows how to pronounce them...

I particularly like the Bible names "Uz" and "Buz" the sons of Nahor, Abraham's brother... One Jewish rabbi says they are pronounced Ooooz and Boooz... another one said Us and Bus, Ooosh and Boosh.....the fact is nobody really knows.

I like "Epaphras"...and many scholars pronounce it that way... but many pronounce it as EPA-FRASS...I don't like that because it sounds like "sassafras" which was my dad's choice curse word when he was frustrated... "*Ah sassafras!*"]

Epaphras was apparently the founder/pastor of the church at Colossae... he visits Paul in prison and is there while Paul writes this letter...it is possible that Epaphras visited Paul then was arrested for his beliefs in Jesus Christ and is imprisoned alongside Paul... In Philemon Paul refers to Epaphras as "**my fellow prisoner in Christ**"...

Verse 1 of chapter 2 suggests that Paul had not been to Colossae... and as far as we know... he never went to Colossae...Most of Paul's letters were to churches he planted on his missionary journeys... So this letter is to a church he didn't plant...he didn't know most of these people personally...

One last thing... this letter is addressing some unknown heresy that had crept into the church... a church, like the other church's Paul cares for, were established on the gospel of Jesus Christ... Jesus is central to their existence... but like many of Paul's planted churches... some heresy has infiltrated... crept in the church at Colossae pushing the gospel... Jesus Christ off from center.

It is most likely for this reason that Epaphras comes to visit Paul... Paul is "an apostle"... Epaphras needs some good biblical counsel in handling what's going on in Colossae... combating these heresies...

These heresies have come to be known as the "Colossian heresy" which is really a combination of several philosophies...a bunch of "isms" have crept in... we'll be looking at greater detail in the weeks to come about these heresies...these were pre-gnostic...

But quickly... these philosophies included:

1. **The Greek philosophy of “humanism”** which basically teaches that man is at the center of the universe... if man is at the center... where does that move Jesus to? Man is at the center of HIS universe, the center of HIS destiny and Man is at the center of whatever solution is needed for whatever problem or situation man is in. Paul addresses this in chapter 2.
2. **Legalism**. Which was largely influenced the Jews—the Jews lived by the Law... you had to DO certain things, obey certain rules and regulations to be in God’s good favor....you had to observe the feasts... the festivals... the sacrificial system... *you had to build a sukkah and have lunch in it!*
3. **Mysticism** which was mainly influenced by Eastern Mysticism... philosophy from the East... a great emphasis on the supernatural... specifically in chapter 2 Paul confronts them on worshipping angels... angels had moved Jesus off center.
4. **Asceticism** which was about depriving one’s self from anything that was at all pleasurable or desirable...anything pleasurable can’t be from God...All these philosophies will be dealt with in chapter 2...

What we will come to notice is that there is an element of all these philosophies... in different forms pressing the church today...all that rambling I went on about the Church being distracted by many things...many of those things have their roots in these philosophies...

Paul’s answer to all these isms and all the heresies is the supremacy and sufficiency of Jesus Christ.

Whatever the “ism” is... or anything else that moves Christ from the center needs to be dealt with...Christ needs to be reestablished in the His place of supremacy... and that is the message in Colossians....

Let’s take a look at the letter’s introduction... see how far we can get—some question the value of going verse by verse through an introduction like this... aren’t these verses just formalities in letter writing?... remember that every word in this book is God’s words....

If you stray from just reading the Bible and begin reading all the commentaries and writings ABOUT the Bible by man... specifically Colossians...sometimes helpful often not... you will find an argument right off the bat... *Who wrote Colossians?*... some highly learned more theologically liberal men have claimed Paul couldn’t have written it because it is not his style... words are used that are not normally words Paul would use...maybe it was written later in the first century...

Let’s settle that argument this morning... the first word in the letter...(1) “**Paul**”...that’s enough for me!...

Read verse 1

This is written in classic first century letter style... I like it... you open the letter and immediately know who wrote it... you don't have to wait to the end like our letters.... Timothy is Paul's travelling companion in his missionary journeys... he's with Paul.

Paul presents his authority to be writing this letter... he's an apostle of Jesus Christ... an apostle is God appointed... apostle means "one sent"... but at its deeper level *it denotes an authorized spokesman for God...* Paul writes this letter to...

Read verse 2

My translation says **to the saints...** a word about that... saint literally means *Holy Ones*... simply anyone who has been "*set apart*" for God... saints are not special dead people that were more holy than others... saints are all believers who put their faith in Jesus Christ....

If that describes you, you are a saint... I keep telling my wife she could call me "Saint Dan".....the point here is the letter is to believers in Christ... and it comes from God... through the apostle Paul.

Read verse 3

I find this amazing really... these people who Paul has never met is on his prayer list... and not just a quick prayer once in a while... Paul prays *always* for them... the amazing part is how many times Paul says he prays always for people in his writings... I tried to count them this week but ran out of time... I got to fourteen times....Paul prays for someone not occasionally but always...

There are two things that Paul has heard and is thankful for about this congregation:

Read verse 4

Paul is going to get on this church's case about the heresies that are creeping in but notice before he does that... he praises them for possessing genuine faith in Christ... specifically he tells them he is **thankful for their faith in Christ and their love for each other...**

Before he delivers his criticism he delivers gentle, kind words of affirmation.... Can't we learn something from that!?... He is thankful for their faith and love... but not just any faith and love... it is a faith and centered on something very specific.

Read verse 5

Faith and love are essential for the Christian.... **But understand faith is nothing on its own...** faith means absolutely nothing by itself... I remember everyone used to encourage each other by saying things like "*Just have faith*"... "*Keep the faith*"... as if faith was all that mattered... it could be faith in yourself... faith in your car... faith in others... Faith is worthless without a faithful object.

They have faith and love because of their great hope...let's bottom line this... their hope is in Jesus Christ... all that He is, all that He has done, all He has promised... our eternal reward in heaven...It is their faith IN CHRIST that Paul is so very thankful for...

Don't let these two verses slide by without seeing Paul's favorite trio of words.... Faith, love and hope... we know it better from 1st Corinthians 13:13 **But now abide faith, hope, love....** The order is different but *faith always precedes hope and love.*

I love what Chuck Swindoll wrote about this: *Faith looks back to the anchor of salvation—Jesus Christ's person and work. Love looks around, building up the body of Christ through selfless service toward one another by the power of the Holy Spirit. Hope looks ahead to the unalterable God the Father, that He will one day usher us into His presence... [the Trinity!]*

This faith, love and hope is spreading... (V.6) **the gospel which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and multiplying, just as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard and understood the grace of God in truth;**

Just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow slave, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf (8) who also informed us of your love in the Spirit.

Fruit... remember fruit from a few weeks ago?... here is a picture of what we were talking about... You hear the gospel....you received the truth of the gospel... they heard it from Epaphras... the gospel...Jesus Christ... you understand it... you embrace it... then what?... you abide in Christ... you dwell in Christ... you live all of life through Christ... Christ is the very center of your life.

What happens?.... fruit!... Not from your efforts... but through your abiding in Christ the Holy Spirit produces fruit in your life... that is what Paul recognizes from these in the body of Christ at Colossae...

Read verse 9

When Paul says he prays that they will be **filled with the knowledge of God's will...** filled means completely full... or totally controlled... Paul prays that the Colossians will be totally controlled by having knowledge...knowing God's will for their lives...

Paul prays that this church will know God's will for their lives... we all want to know Gods will for our lives... One of the biggest questions I get is *How can I know God's will for my life?...*

God's will is not some secret to discover...knowing God's will comes from knowing God's word... that's what Paul means when he says here **...that you may be filled with the full knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding...**

Where do you get God's wisdom and understanding?.... God's Word!**HAVING THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD'S WORD REVEALS TO US GOD'S WILL FOR OUR LIVES.**

Read God's Word you get to know God's mind... Paul in 1 Corinthians 2:16 "**For who has known the mind of the Lord, so as to instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ**"

Quickly... what are the results of having this knowledge of God's will?

Read verses 10-11

- A worthy walk
- A fruitful life
- Increasing in the knowledge of God
- Strengthened with all power
- For the attaining of steadfastness, patience and joy

Conclude **Read verses 12-14**