

XLIX. Traveling Route 66: The Bible in Biblical Perspective
The Journey with Christ, the Promised One
“Colossians—The Book on Communion with Christ”
Book of Colossians
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We will do a quick study in the book of Colossians which will also bring us to the Lord’s Supper at the conclusion of our study. This study will continue our series of Traveling Route 66. In our series of Traveling Route 66 the 39 books of the Old Testament is the journey to Christ and the 27 books of the New Testament is the journey with Christ. We are at the letter to the church at Colossae and in each of these studies we are attempting to get an understanding from a 30,000 foot view to see how we’re focused in conclusion with the book. This is always hard for me because my tendency is always to dig deep in the text and not to fly at 30,000 feet but both are valuable. So in this study we’ll just go over the book of Colossians and then come to the Lord’s Supper. I’d like to look at the beginning and end of Colossians and then look a few passages in the middle of it.

Let’s start by looking at the introduction or greeting. Colossians 1:1-2 says [1] *Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother* (here we know who is writing the book), [2] *To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father.* Now let’s look at his conclusion. Colossians 4:7-18 says [7] *Tychicus will tell you all about my activities. He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord.* [8] *I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts,* [9] *and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you (a member at the church of Colossae). They will tell you of everything that has taken place here.*

[10] *Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions—if he comes to you, welcome him),* [11] *and Jesus who is called Justus. These are the only men of the circumcision (that is Jewish) among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me.* [12] *Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God.* [13] *For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis.* [14] *Luke the beloved physician greets you, as does Demas.* [15] *Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house.* [16] *And when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea.* [17] *And say to Archippus, “See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord.”* [18] *I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.*

Who wrote the book of Colossians? Paul wrote it in the company of Timothy and a number who are with him. Paul the Apostle is the author of this epistle.

To whom is he writing this book? He is writing it to the saints or the believers who are gathered in the church of Colossae. It is what we call the epistle to the

Colossians. As he is writing this there are some things you can begin to string together. Before we cover what he is stringing together let's look at the next point.

Where is Paul writing Colossians? He is writing it from prison. Acts 27 and 28 covers Paul's first imprisonment when he was under what we might call house arrest and he was actually still preaching and teaching. He was helping that church at Rome and winning people to Christ from Caesar's household. He was winning Roman soldiers to Christ. All of those things are taking place while he is in prison and from this prison he writes four letters. We have already covered a couple of these letters – Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians. The one we haven't covered yet is Philemon.

The book of Philemon is written for an expressed purpose. One of the leaders at the church of Colossae in whose house the church of Colossae met was a man named Philemon and he had a slave named Onesimus. Onesimus ran away and back then when you ran away you were guilty of a crime of capital punishment. When he ran away he decided not to hide in the wilderness but hide in a crowd. Where is the biggest crowd to go hide in? It is in Rome. When he gets to Rome he meets up with Paul. Paul leads him to Jesus and Onesimus becomes a "faithful" brother and servant in the Lord. The name Onesimus means useful. So Onesimus is now really useful.

So Paul writes four letters from prison. One is to the Ephesians, the mother church of Colossae. Then he writes to the Colossians and to the Philippians. Then he writes one to Philemon and paraphrasing Paul tells him Onesimus is now a brother in the Lord and wants Philemon to set him free. He also tells Philemon that he owes him a lot anyway. So basically Paul says if Onesimus owes him anything then put it on Paul's account. That is what we'd call a little bit of pastoral pressure.

We know that at least three of these four epistles come by the hand of a two man team that delivers them from Paul's prison. The two man team is Tychicus and Onesimus. They have come bearing the epistles. That is quite a bit of bravery here on Onesimus' part but I'll get to more of that when I cover Philemon. Basically Onesimus is on the way carrying a letter to a man who can put him to death. This letter is coming to the church at Colossae, to Philemon who houses the church at Colossae. So Philemon will get another letter after this.

So when did this letter get written? If it was written when Paul was in prison then it has to be between 60 and 62 A.D. This is from Paul's first imprisonment not his second. As Paul writes this letter he is focused in on one essential thing and that is he wants to deal with a number of heresies.

So why is Paul writing this letter? There are a number of heresies that have sprung up at the church of Colossae. Interestingly, Paul very likely had never been there. There is no evidence that Paul had ever been there directly. He may have but he may not have. He did not plant the church. Who planted the church? It has already been mentioned. Let's look back at Colossians 1.

Colossians 1:6-7 says [6] *which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth,[7] just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf [8] and has made known to us your love in the Spirit.* The church at Colossae probably had been planted by Epaphras who brought the Gospel to them. Epaphras continued to intercede for you, pray for you and labor for you that you might mature in the Gospel. It is clear,

very likely that Epaphras has come to Paul to get some advice and he brings a report. Here are the positive things going on, where all churches have commendations and all churches have things to deal with.

So Paul is saying Epaphras is giving us a report of the church's love in the Spirit and the bond of grace and peace that is going on there but he also brought news about some problems. There was a problem of legalism. The charge of legalism should not be thrown around as easy as it is today. Legalism is when you have the notion that your obedience to God's Word merits or secures your salvation. We have a habit today that if anybody gets intentional in dealing with sin and takes steps to kill sin in their life then we say they're legalistic. No, you're a legalist if you think your obedience saves you or enables God to save you. That's legalism. So the church at Colossae had issues with legalism. Secondly, they had issues with Old Testament ritualism that they gave credence to for salvation. Thirdly, they had a problem with angel worship where they didn't see angels as ministering spirits but worshipping them and what was creeping into that was a diminishing of the doctrine of Christ because of it.

I remember when I was in college and people used to say "If we could only get back to the New Testament church." Mr. Perkins said to us "Those who want to get back to the New Testament church, which one do you want to get back to – Corinth where they had incest or Colossae where they did angel worship or Philippi which had a problem with kenotic heresy, understanding the full deity of Christ and seeing that Christ in His humanity actually diminished His deity?" As much as I admire what happened in the New Testament churches you and I are in a much better position for we have the Bible. They didn't. They had men showing up saying "I'm speaking for God." "Oh you are? Who are you?" "It doesn't matter but I'm speaking for Jesus." They had to test them.

There are two offices in the church that we don't even have to test anymore – apostles and prophets. They are done with. The Prophets pointed to Jesus and the Apostles walked and talked with Jesus and have given us the Word. We have their product and it's the Bible. Now God has given us evangelists to spread the Gospel and pastor/teachers to equip us. We now judge them and their ministry by the faithfulness to the Word of God. You have the sufficient, inerrant, infallible Word of God in your very hands that the Lord has providentially provided for you. That is the benefit we have that I would not change to go back to the first century at all.

So here are these problems of legalism, ritualism and angelic worship. There seems to have been maybe an early form of Gnosticism that would later ravage the church, but in that how do you tackle the problems of the Christian life that is diminished because of theological error? How do you answer all of those errors? First I want to give you a basic seven point outline of Colossians and then I'll answer the errors for you.

The introduction is in Colossians 1:1-2. The prayer of thanksgiving is found in Colossians 1:3-8. The prayer of intercession for the church at Colossae is found in Colossians 1:9-14. Then you have the message of the book of Colossae of the epistle. Let's look at this starting in Colossians 1:13.

Colossians 1:13-20 says [13] *He (Christ) has delivered us from the domain (power) of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, [14] in whom (Christ) we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. [15] He (Christ) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. [16] For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or*

authorities—all things were created through him and for him. [17] And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. [18] And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. [19] For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, [20] and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

Here we see the supremacy of Christ. Now with this glorious Christ Paul now says that you're ready to understand his ministry. Paul's ministry is explained in Colossians 1:24 through 2:7. Now that he has explained his ministry in light of the supremacy of Christ he articulates the sufficiency of Christ. Let's look at this starting in Colossians 2:6.

Colossians 2:6-15 says [6] Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, [7] rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. [8] See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. [9] For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, [10] and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. [11] In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ (the Old Testament sign is fulfilled in Christ, what about the New Testament sign?), [12] having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. [13] And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, [14] by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. [15] He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

In Paul's prison cell, if it's like the accounts of Roman imprisonment that stand legion, they would put a man in a cell and put the charge above him. If it was a capital offense they would take the charge and nail it to wherever they killed him. Do you remember the plaque they put over Jesus at the cross? So very likely, Paul, while he is not under a capital sentence at this moment but he will be in his second imprisonment, the charge would be up over his cell. He is telling us that the charge against you – the wages of sin is death – Jesus took that certificate of God's judgment against you and me and He nailed it to the cross and said "It is finished" (In Greek "tetelestai"). It was paid in full and now I'm forgiven. Paul now says "Let's take on these heresies that come from the vain imagination of man's philosophy."

You and I do not have a religion that comes from reason or imagination of man. We have a relationship with Christ that leads to a true religion which is a sacred way of life for Christ who has saved us, not a way to be saved but a way to live for the Savior. We have that not upon intuition or imagination but upon Divine revelation, God's Word. That's our foundation. That's where we start. That's what explains everything. God's Word faithfully preached always comes back to Christ and the Gospel message comes back to the cross, the Word of the cross, where the love of God met the holiness of God to save sinners for the glory of God.

Now you can see how this outline is unfolding because after he gets to the sufficiency of Christ he takes on the heresy at Colossae. Then he covers the new life in Christ – the life of Christ, the life in Christ, the life for Christ – and how to put off the old man and put on the new man found in Colossians 3:1 through 4:6. Then the conclusion which we already covered in Colossians 4:7-18. So what is Paul doing?

Here is Paul's theme. His theme is very simply, the preeminence and prominence of Christ as the sovereign and sufficient Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer of all things and over all things, as the firstborn of creation and the Head of the church. In that there is a wonderful insight that I think highlights the communion table. I will confess to you that I love the truth of God's Word and I love to enter into discussions, maybe even sanctified debates about the truth of God's Word. Therefore it can very easily be drawn into "philosophical" discussions, but I am not a philosopher. God has called me to be a preacher. Philosophers are set about "seeking" truth and that is not my job. My job is to announce the truth, to proclaim the truth. I would be more than happy to work through any and all issues. Every honest question has some good honest answers but I have only one place to give you the answers. Every answer will come back to the fact that Christ is the sovereign, sufficient Savior. That's where we'll end up.

It is in Christ that all things were made, visible and invisible. It is by His spoken word that all things have come into existence. He is the Creator. He is the Firstborn of the creation. That doesn't mean He had a time that He wasn't and He was born as a created entity. It is not describing when Jesus came into existence because the same text tells you that He is before all things (Colossians 1:15-24). He is eternal but the Firstborn of creation is a title. As the Son of God He not only reveals God (sons bear the mark of the father) but He is the visible image of the invisible God. A son also inherits everything from the father. All that the Father has authored in creation and accomplished through Him, is His. It belongs to Him. To quote Abraham Kuyper, "Not one inch of this world belongs to anyone or anyone else but Jesus Christ. He is the Lord of every Adam, everything that exists, visible and invisible."

He is not only the firstborn of creation, the One through whom all things are made and for whom all things were made, but He is the firstborn of the dead. That is why He is the Head of the church. He is the Redeemer of His people through His death, burial and resurrection. Don't miss this. In Him all things hold together. That glorious doctrine of Divine providence is true because Christ is able to sustain us, by the power of His might and His hand.

So what is the key here? There could be some amazing discussion as to how utterly senseless angelic worship should be and to dismantle Old Covenant ritualism where you're saved by circumcision or you're saved by "observing the Sabbath and new moons." That could easily be dismantled in a discussion process as to why the Old Testament signs, symbols and shadows do not save you. They were pointing to the Savior. Not only can angelic worship and ritualism be dismantled, but legalism can be dismantled by simply saying if you and I were capable of saving ourselves why in the world would God send His Son to die on a cross? I wouldn't give my son for anyone to begin with but if you could save yourself I certainly wouldn't give him to die for you. I'd just send you a note that says "Buck up and do better."

The answers to all of the errors and heresies of life come back to a robust, Biblical, vibrant doctrine of God revealed in the preeminence and prominence of Christ

as Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. That doesn't mean if people have theological errors and heresies that we don't sit down and get into the weeds if necessary and it's not just that Jesus is the answer. I'm not saying that but actually Jesus is the answer. I'll be more than happy to peel the onion back with you but when we get it peeled back we're going to get to this answer; Christ is our life. Hallelujah for the life in Christ.

It's very easy for us who have been saved by the Gospel to get off on two tracks. We either get off on the track of antinomianism or what's called libertinism where I'm saved by grace and we get real haphazard about our Christian life, otherwise known as what I call sloppy agape. It's where we think I love Jesus but it really doesn't matter how intentional I am. Then over here is the notion of legalism which is saying "It's my life that allows God to get done what He's going to get done." That's why God so very wonderfully gives us the Gospel and the Word to be preached. The Word of the cross is your Hope. It is where your sin record was nailed and your sinful heart was nailed and from that cross He pours forth His Spirit to give you a new life.

So how can I who have died to sin still live in it? How can I possibly think that it is my abilities that allow God to get the job done? The cross eradicates both of those. It puts a stick of dynamite under the dam of legalism to blow it up so that the River of Life can flow free and it sends the wonderful, theological, environmental protection agency to stop up and vacuum up the creek of licentiousness so that I will hate the sin that sent my Savior to the tree out of His love for me. That's why Paul keeps coming right back here.

So is it any wonder as we come to the Table that we're going to remember the body and the blood. The Table was not designed to get you back to the manger. Praise the Lord for the incarnation. Nor does this Table focused upon the resurrection, although it affirms it because we will do this until He comes again. That means He has risen. Nor does this Table predominate itself with the crown of Christ that He now wears for all authority has been given to Him in heaven and on earth, although we rejoice in it as ambassadors for Christ. This Table brings you back where every theological error can be corrected and where every Christian life faltering, whether it's in the ditch of legalism or the ditch of libertinism, is eradicated. Our eyes are fixed on Him and the cross where our burdens are rolled away. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the time we could be together as we conclude the study by coming to the Table with You. We thank You for what a glorious Savior we have, hallelujah! Father, would You take Your Word that we have sung, read and proclaimed and overcome all of our inadequacies, bring in the fullness of the Holy Spirit and our focus upon the majesty and glory of Christ? I thank You that You earnestly desire to eat this meal with us. We rejoice to sit at the Table together with our Savior, who is risen even as we remember the body and blood of Christ, our Ransom and our Redemption. We glory in our Redeemer, what a Savior! In Jesus' Name, Amen.