

Colossians

INTRODUCTION

Heresy had broken out in the church at Colosse, misleading the young believers, calling for the worship of angels (2:18) and a strict observance of Jewish ceremonies (2:16, 21). This heresy was a mixture of Jewish, Greek and Oriental religions, and all this called forth the statement of the truth of the supreme Lordship of Christ. This epistle draws a faithful portrait of Christ in all His glory and dignity.

Christ is all in all. The failure of the Colossians was at this very point, not holding fast to the Lord. The place Christ holds in any religious teaching determines whether it is true or false. Some thought in Paul's day, as now that Jesus was but a man, and Christ was the divine Spirit which came at His baptism and left Him at the cross. This meant that Christ did not die but simply that Jesus died. You can see that this is the root error of many cults today.

The church was founded by Epaphras (1:7) in the town of Colosse, about 100 miles east of Ephesus. It consisted of Gentile Christians. Philemon was a member.

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. Paul writes especially on the pre-eminence and deity of Christ, for **Christ is very God**.

Colossians presents the glorious culmination of it all. We are "complete in Him." We are "rooted and built up," we are "grounded and settled." We discover the facts of this building process in the four chapters of this book.

Building "downward," rooted in Jesus, grounded and settled (1:23)

Building "upward," built up in Him (2:7)

Building "inward," hid with Christ (3:3)

Building "outward," walking in wisdom toward them that are without (4:5)

(What The Bible Is All About, Henrietta Mears)

Colossians 1:1-13

Faith, hope and love (Col. 1:4-5), the great trinity of Christian graces, were the foundation of the Christian character of the disciples at Colosse. From these all the graces of the Spirit unfold in a manifold and beautiful variety and completeness. Nowhere have we a simpler, stronger and more attractive picture of an ideal Christian life.

(The Christ in the Bible Commentary, A. B. Simpson)

Paul prayed that the believers at Colosse might be filled with the knowledge of God's will, that they might walk worthy of the Lord, that they would be strengthened with all might, and give thanks unto the Father. **Why should it be necessary to continue praying for a church that had such a good reputation in the Lord?**

Mark 14:38 Gal. 5:1 Gal. 5:16,17 Gal. 6:1 2 Thess. 2:11,12 2 Thess. 3:3,4 1 Tim. 6:20,21 2
Tim. 2:15,16,19 1 Pet. 5:8,9

Colossians 1:14-22

Each of Paul's epistles has an expression peculiar to itself. For example, the Thessalonian epistles are characterized by the advent tinge, and shine with the glory of the second coming. Ephesians is the epistle of the "heavenly realms"; Philippians of the sweetness of the Christian temper; and Colossians is the portrait of Jesus, and its keynote is "Christ is all and in all."

It is said that the celebrated artist, Dannecker, was asked by Napoleon Bonaparte to paint a Venus for the Louvre, and he declined. An almost fabulous price was then offered, and he still refused. The insulted emperor, astonished that any one should refuse money, and still more that he should refuse the emperor, demanded why he declined. "I have painted Christ and I can never lower my brush to paint an inferior subject."

And it had taken him half a lifetime to paint his picture of Christ. The first time he painted Him, after eight years of labor, he asked his little daughter to look at it. Uncovering the canvas he brought her in. She clapped her hands together with an expression of intense surprise and admiration. "Who do you think it is?" he asked. "Oh," she said, "it is a great man." His countenance fell and he took his brush and daubed the picture into a perfect wreck. "I have failed. It is not Christ." He went to work again and toiled and prayed, and when he took the child in the next time there was not the same expression of wonder, delight and admiration, but the tears came. Then she stole softly up as though it were the real Christ, whispering, "Let the little children come to Me." Ah, it was Christ! The expression was there!

So there are lives that remind you of a great man, and there are others that reveal the vision of a living Savior; these are messages that are not forgotten. All that remains is the memory of Jesus, and you feel somehow your heart burned within you as you got near the Master, and you are the better for it. Thus the Epistle of the Colossians is the picture of Jesus. It reveals to us the heart of Christ.

Christ is all and all in creation. "For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities: all things were created by him and for him"(1:16). Christ is the Author and the End of creation. All the glory of nature is but the reflection of His own glory. The Father is revealed in the Son. The Son is revealed in the majesty of nature. The shining heavens and verdant earth are but the mirror of His attributes and the work of His hands.

Christ is all and in all in the realm of providence. "In him all things hold together" (Colossians 1:17). Literally this is translated in the Revised Version, "All things hang together." He is the cohesive center and principle of nature and providence. He is the Lord and Ruler of universal government. He who by one creative act formed the universe and by continuous activity upholds and sustains it.

Not a fluttering bird which sings in the branches, not an insect that floats upon the air, not a bud that bursts in the vernal spring, not a star which shines in the vast empyrean, but is constantly dependent on the activity of His hand. He who bears the universe upon His shoulder carries His loved ones on His heart, and with a more particular providence plans every instant and incident of their life and causes all things to work together for their good.

It is the Lamb who looses the scroll of seven seals and unfolds every destiny for the individual and the universe. The ascended Christ is Head over all things for His Body, the Church. And while the ambitions and passions of man have their full sway in the evolving of human history, yet He rules or overrules in every event and forges every link into a chain of infinite wisdom, power and love, so that even the things that seem to hinder only help at last His ultimate design. The wrath of man is made to praise (Psalm 76:10, KJV). The dark shadows of seeming calamity are but part of the picture of His life and love, and when all is finished, the saints of earth and the intelligences of heaven shall unite to say, "Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the ages. Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy" (Revelation 15:3-4a).

Christ is all and in all in the Trinity. The epistle brings out His relation to the Father, for we read: "For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in Him" (Colossians 1:19). The Father is pleased to express Himself in the Son, to pour Himself into Christ and stand back while Christ fills the picture and reveals the Father. We do not directly see the

Father, but we see the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Again we read, "for in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form" (Col. 2:9).

(The Christ in the Bible Commentary, A. B. Simpson)

Some people attempt to use verse 15 to prove that Jesus was not God, but merely a created being. **What Scriptures disprove this false claim?**

Ps. 2:7 Ps. 89:4,27 Isa. 9:6 Matt. 3:17 Luke 3:22 John 1:1-4,10,14,15,16,18 John 8:53-58
John 17:5,21-23 Acts 13:33 Col. 1:16-17

Notice verse 19: "For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell." Thus far Paul has set forth the preeminence of Christ in His being the image of God, the Creator of the universe, and the Head of the church. Paul now shows Christ's preeminence in view of His redeeming work, for the ultimate purpose of the Father was "to reconcile all things unto Himself" through the work of His Son.

Following are statements to be marked either True (T) or False (F):

___ In order "to reconcile all things unto Himself" all barriers between God and men had to be removed.

___ These barriers included both man's desire to sin without repentance, and God's awful hatred of sin.

___ These difficulties (on both sides) could not be removed merely by the death of Christ.

___ The cross, though ugly and reviling, reveals the love of God for sinners; it makes them respond by wanting to do God's will.

___ Man needed to be reconciled to God, and man took the initiative to bring it about.

___ In all other religions of the world, men are seeking God; in Christianity, God is seeking man.

___ Man could never accomplish the work of reconciliation; God had to remove the obstacles, and provide an atonement for sin—His Son.

___ In Christ's atonement (His death on the cross) the sins of the whole world were placed upon Him. In His agonizing death, He was able to cancel all power of sin (past, present and future) and also defeat the power of the devil, by the complete shedding of His blood, so that all who believed (trusted) in Him might be set free and be reconciled to a holy God.

Colossians 1:23-2:3

Paul drank deeply of the Master's cup. It seemed as if Jesus had trusted him with participation in the sorrows of Gethsemane and Calvary. And he was thus fitted for the stewardship of two great secrets, which it was his joy to unfold. In Ephesians 3 he says that he was commissioned to show the Gentiles that they might become fellow-heirs, but here, v. 27, he says that they might experience the indwelling of Christ. Those who are conscious of that indwelling know its riches of power and joy and victory. Their hope of glory is dimmed by no fear, because they have the Christ in their hearts, and therefore they have Heaven in their hearts; so it follows naturally that their hearts will one day be with Christ in Heaven. Christ *in* us is "the hope of glory."

(Through the Bible Day by Day, F. B. Meyer)

Paul was ordained a minister of God in order to make known the mystery of God, which heretofore had been hidden, and certainly was not known in the Old Testament. **What is this mystery that had been hidden through many ages, and now is about to be revealed to God's saints?**

Matt. 13:3-50 1 Cor. 2:1-16 Eph. 5:13-14, 31-32 Col. 2:9-10

Notice carefully the following: Paul counted his own present suffering as a privilege that identified him with his Lord (Acts 9:16; Phil. 3:10). The Lord now will be identified with His church (Acts 9:4), and the church's destiny will also be suffering (Phil. 1:29). And now, in revealing this mystery to the Gentiles (i.e., the open, revealed secret concerning the redemptive work of Christ), it also tells us one more great fact—Jews and Gentiles will now be united in Him (Eph. 2:11-22).

Colossians 2:4-10

Christ is all and in all in the life of His people. For, in the first place, our life all begins by receiving Him. “So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him” (Colossians 2:6). It is not receiving a sacrament, a creed, a system of theology, a set of moral precepts, but a living, personal Savior. That is salvation. “Whoever comes to me I will never drive away” (John 6:37).

Then further, the continuance and progress of our Christian life is just as simple and as personal. “Continue to live in him” (Colossians 2:6). It is a life of dependence and communion, step by step, receiving Him afresh as our all-sufficiency, our wisdom, strength and holiness.

Still further, we are taught that we are complete in Him (2:10). That is to say, He fills up every possible need of our life and being. For the deeper life of sanctification is simply Christ within. This is the mystery, Paul says,

that has been kept hidden for the ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. (1:26-27)

This is so simple that it really cannot be made more plain. It is not a process of teaching, or even the formation of a character. It is acquaintance with a Person, an intimate union and fellowship with Him so that He actually comes into our being and becomes the Source and Strength of our very life, reliving His own life in us; and we fall with perfect naturalness into His will, His plan, His steps and all His perfect life. So deep and intimate this union that a great variety of figures are introduced to express and illustrate its fuller meaning. We are “rooted ... in Him” (2:7). We are “built up in Him” (2:7). We are “buried with Him” (2:12). When we were “dead in [our] sins” (2:13), we were “raised with Christ” (3:1). Our life is hidden with Christ in God’ (3:3). He Himself is our very life (3:4).

(The Christ in the Bible Commentary, A. B. Simpson)

The Colossians did not need comfort in sorrow but rather confirmation in faith; namely, a closer unity in love, a deepening of conviction, and a fuller knowledge of Christ. **Do we fully grasp these in our own lives; do we realize that Christ is the supreme and essential revelation; that He is the Son of God, the Eternal Word, the Light of the world; the Alpha and Omega of all things, and everlasting Life?**

Paul is telling us (yes, insisting) that ALL of the following are stored up for us in Christ:

The whole wealth of spiritual insight which men need

The beliefs concerning God which they should hold

The laws of conduct by which they are to be guided

May our hearts be bowed in prayerful submission always to His will!

Colossians 2:11-13

“In Him you were circumcised,” writes the apostle, “with a circumcision not made by hands.” As if to say, “the knife power of the death of Christ has been applied to you by God, who alone can perform this operation, ‘even the offcasting of the whole body of the flesh. . . .’” “The casting off, not (as in outward circumcision) of a part, but the whole body of the flesh, the whole carnal nature.”

The necessity for the knife to be taken to the fallen flesh if men were to have any relationship with God, is the significant meaning of the rite of circumcision given to Abraham. It was a type of the future work of the Cross when in the fullness of time the Son of God, having taken upon Himself the “flesh of sin” would for His redeemed ones not only bear their sins, as a propitiatory sacrifice, but put off from Himself the likeness of the “flesh of sin” He had taken on their behalf, and lead them out into a new sphere as a new creation. Accordingly, “They that are *of Christ Jesus*,” writes the apostle, “have crucified the flesh with the passions and lusts thereof.”

Here we have the application to the sinner of the power of the Cross, in a “circumcision not made with hands,” actually said to *have been* carried out. “They who are *of Christ*—made a new creation by Him, so that they are now of Him, and not of the ‘first Adam’—*have* crucified the flesh. . . .” The apostle speaks of just as real a circumcision as the Jewish rite, but carried out by no human hands. He speaks too of the “casting off” of not a *part* of the flesh as in circumcision, but of the whole carnal nature. Not a partial work, but a full one. Not a “gradual” mastery of the sins of the flesh, but a casting off of the old Adam life as decisively as the cutting work.

(All Things New, Jessie Penn Lewis)

Today we observe many people believing that they are born again with a new life in Christ, yet, with many, their actions and their thinking are of the former "flesh" nature rather than the spirit nature of our Lord. Others vacillate between flesh and spirit thinking and acting, not realizing that this is harming and degrading the work of our Savior in its lack of consistency and holiness. Our Lord's life was never lived in variation; He was always pure and holy. **Explain the circumcision that the Christian has, which is made without hands. If one realizes the true blessing of this spiritual circumcision, can that person walk in full victory such as described in Col. 3:1-7?**

Deut. 10:16 Deut. 30:6 Jer. 4:4 Rom. 2:28,29 Rom. 6:6 Rom. 7:24 Gal. 5:24 Phil. 3:3

Colossians 2:14-23

And then when it comes to the question of conduct, our actions are to be determined by our relation to Him. It is because we are in Him that we are to act like Him. And so we read, "Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus" (3:17).

To act in the name of Jesus is to act as if you were Jesus, to sustain His character, His dignity and the life that would be expected from Him if He Himself were here. But it is our relation to Him that inspires our conduct. We need the powerful motive of His life and love, yes, and the actual force of His indwelling Spirit to enable us to live out His life in our daily conduct and conversation.

(The Christ in the Bible Commentary, A. B. Simpson)

Many false religious leaders try to control people's lives by putting them under the subjection of ritual ordinances and doctrines. Since salvation is not realized through their observation of these forms, Jesus told the scribes and Pharisees that they were blind guides that "strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel" (Matt 23:24). He taught that "these things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh" (2:23). **How should the true Christian's time and energy be spent in living for and worshipping God as He has taught us?**

John 9:4 1 Cor. 14:12 1 Cor. 14:15 1 Cor. 15:58 Eph. 5:1-19 Col. 4:5-6 Phil. 3:10-14 2 Tim. 2:15
1 Thess. 4:11-12 1 John 3:24

Colossians 3:1-17

By a very fine metaphor the apostle describes the Christian life under the figure of disrobing and robing a person. Our garments are frequently used to denote our character. And so the word habit has come to mean both our dress and manner of living. There is first the process of disrobing. It begins with the putting off of our old habits and dispositions, our old clothes. "But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other" (3:8-9). All this has reference to sinful acts and dispositions. Next, however, we strip not only to the skin, but to the bone, and to the very heart. For we put off our very selves. "You have taken off your old self with its practices" (3:9). This is the entire renunciation and crucifixion of our old self and our whole natural life.

Next comes the process of robing. This begins inside. There must be a new man first before he can wear his new clothes. You would not put clean and beautiful garments on an unbathed person. And so we read, "And have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all" (3:10-11).

This is not the old man improved, but it is the Christ man, the Lord Jesus Himself becoming our new life so perfectly that even our national, social and ecclesiastical distinctions, peculiarities and characteristics disappear, and Christ is all and in all. Then having put on the new man, we put on the new clothes, "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you" (3:12-13). Here we have the fine undergarments of compassion, a sympathetic, tender sensitiveness to the sufferings and feelings of others, a kind and loving manner, a meek and lowly spirit, a longsuffering patience, the beautiful robe of forgiveness full of pockets that are all open at the bottom, where we receive the wrongs of others to drop them behind us.

Then there comes as the last article of our new apparel, the belt, which in Oriental countries binds all the robes compactly around the person, and enables him to move and work without embarrassment. And so love is our belt, compacting all our graces into service and enabling us to use our blessing for the blessing of others. This is the meaning of the 14th verse. "Over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together." Beloved, here is the fashion plate from the heavenly wardrobe for a well-dressed Christian. Let us see to it that we are in the style of the kingdom and the society above.

As soon as we are dressed it is right that we should go forth to our various walks. First we read of their former walk in evil things. "You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived" (3:7).

Next we have the companion of their walk. "Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live [walk, KJV] in him" (2:6). This is not a solitary walk, but like Enoch they walk with God. Then we have the posture in which they walk, their pose of lofty dignity as the children of the king. "That you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way" (1:10).

And finally, we have their walk before the world. In all carefulness and consistency, so deporting themselves as not to bring reproach upon the name of Christ before the ungodly, and to use every opportunity to bear witness for the Lord and to be a blessing to men. "Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity" (4:5). Beloved, is this our walk?

(The Christ in the Bible Commentary, A. B. Simpson)

If now we have risen with Christ, we are to set our affections on things above and not on things on earth. Then the very life of God will penetrate our lives and the peace of God will rule as an umpire within our hearts. In Romans 8:1 Paul tells us that there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. **Reading on in Romans chapter 8, vv. 2-17, tell in your words what place the Holy Spirit has in the believer's life, and how through His power we are able to be true sons of God, putting to death the deeds of the body. From this, are you better able to understand why Jesus had to leave, returning to His Father, and then sending the Holy Spirit in His place? (See John 14:16-17).**

Colossians 3:18-25

Of course, their Christian life was a practical one, reaching through a whole circle of domestic, social and public life, making them better wives, husbands, fathers, children, masters, servants and business men. But it is not their practice so much as their principles that the apostle emphasizes. Christian ethics do not consist so much in a thousand minute directions about the details of duty, as in a few sound, comprehensive principles of action which apply to every question and settle every point. Three such principles are given here.

1. "Live a life worthy of the Lord and . . . please him in every way" (1:10).
2. "Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus" (3:17).
3. "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men" (3:23).

(The Christ in the Bible Commentary, A. B. Simpson)

Wives are to submit themselves to their husbands, husbands are to love their wives, children are to obey their parents and servants are to obey their masters. **What should be the motivation directing the carrying out of these instructions?**

Matt. 6:24 Matt. 22:37-39 John 15:5-7,12,17 John 21:15-17 Rom. 8:12-14

Does the submission spoken of here mean subjection or slavery? Explain

1 Cor. 14:40

Colossians 4:1-18

We have had the picture of Christ and of the Christian in Colossians. Now let us study the composite portrait of the Christian worker as presented in the different ideals set forth in this delightful apostolic letter. One of the highest qualities of a great life is to inspire others with its own spirit and aims, and reproduce its work in other workers. The divine Master has done more through the workers that He called and commissioned than through His own personal ministry. And so the great Apostle Paul had the peculiar gift of setting others to work and so communicating to them the principles and objects for which he lived that his life and work were reproduced in them. Paul was the center of a glorious cluster of men and women who finely represent the manifold gifts and ministries of the Spirit. A number of them are brought to the front in the incidental allusions and the personal salutations of this epistle, and as we have said, they together form a composite picture of the ideal Christian worker.

This is a very simple but a very high picture of a true minister of Christ. First of all he is "a dear brother" (4:7), for it is more important to be than to do. His personal character is the foundation of his public work. Then Paul recognizes him as a servant, "a fellow servant in the Lord" (4:7). For the fundamental idea of service is divine ownership and entire dedication to the Master and His work. But above everything else he is "a faithful minister" (4:7). He may not have been brilliant, but he is true; and this is the highest testimony that can be given to a servant. He can be depended upon. He is thoroughly reliable and he is always ready for whatever message or trust his leader had to commit to his hands.

On the present occasion he (Tychicus) was sent from Rome to carry this epistle and to bear the greeting of the apostle to the church at Colosse, and he was just as ready to be an errand boy and a messenger as a teacher or an apostle. He was also a minister of comfort. The apostle sent him that "he may encourage [their] hearts" (4:8).

The true minister must have a heart of sympathy and the power to cheer and comfort the distressed. Beloved, can it be said of us whatever our ministry—pastor, evangelist, elder, Sunday school teacher, parent—that we have been faithful ministers of Jesus Christ?

(The Christ in the Bible Commentary, A. B. Simpson)

As Paul came to the close of his letter to the Colossians, to whom he had indeed revealed the depth of his own heart, he said: "Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving" (Col. 4:1). **In order to see the work of Christ in His Church fulfilled today according to God's planning, regardless of the unhealthy world situation, what should be the earnest burden and thrust of the prayers of fully dedicated saints of God? According to the faithful promises of God, is there any room for entertaining doubt or fear? In what does our battle strength lie?**

Why is the word "salt" (Col. 4:6) used to describe our speech? See Num. 18:19 particularly to see its connection with God's eternal covenant.

Lev. 2:13 Num. 18:19 2 Chr. 13:5 Ezek. 43:24 Matt. 5:13 Mark 9:49-50 Luke 14:34, 35 Col. 4:6

When David, still a young lad, faced an overpowering Goliath, we read in 1 Samuel 17 that his eyes and thoughts were not on himself, but on that great God of Israel, and in Him he trusted. Again, from that sainted apostle Paul, who had himself experienced the zenith of human sufferings and opposition at that time, come these reassuring words:

"What shall separate us from the love of Christ?

Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine,
Or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

As it is written:

'For your sake we are killed all day long;

We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.'

Yet in all these things we are **more than conquerors**

Through Him who loved us.

For I am persuaded that neither death nor life,

Nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers,

Nor things present nor things to come,

Nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing

Shall be able to separate us from the love of God

Which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Romans 8:35-39

Scripture tells us that the following people all had true dedication and zeal for the Lord's work: Paul, Tychicus, Onesimus, Aristarchus, Mark, Justus, Epaphras, Luke and Demas. Remember that throughout the whole Bible God always has His faithful remnant. **What will prompt and ensure this same dedication and zeal in our lives for God and His people?**

Micah 6:8 Matt. 22:37-39 John 15:14-15 John 21:15-17 Eph. 4:23, 24 Eph. 4:30-32 Eph. 5:1, 2, 15-19

Eph. 6:1-18 Rev. 2:4-5