

Colossians – An Overview

Col 1: 15 - 23

Before we go on, let me tell you how I intend to take us thru this book. By the time we finish studying the book my prayer is that you will know this book so well that you yourself will feel comfortable to stand up at any time and preach from the book.

So how do we do this? Well if you have ever seen a forest, you know that there are 3 ways you can view a forest

Birds eye view – beautiful and needful but it does not see the details

Walk thru the forest – notice the trees, the majestic eucalyptus, the magnificent oak trees, reaching up into the sky, the twisted Jacaranda, all beautiful in their bloom.

The third way to study the forest is to **look down** at the un-noticed shrub, and look over there is a short creeper with succulent berries, and some mushrooms spotting the grown like delicate white puffs, some tender shoots whose potential has yet to be unpacked.

I want to do all three things with the book of Colossians, and therefore make us very familiar with the text, and the many treasures and mysteries hidden in it.

First a Birds eye view

III – Receiving The Holy Spirit In India

III – Nita and eating meat.

So it is in too many of our Christian traditions today – you receive Christ but that in and of itself is not considered to be enough. It always seems as though there is one more loop you must go thru to qualify – salvation in and of itself is not enough.

This problem is not a new one, it goes back to the beginning of the church – there were always those who came along and said *“Acknowledging Christ as your savior is good, but if you REALLY want to get saved, then you must . . . “*

Come only to our church

Be baptized only in this way

Have hands laid upon you only by our pastor

Submit only to our teaching, etc

There is always something else that must be added to the Cross otherwise you are not really saved . . . you are only a second class Christian, barely acceptable to God.

This was the exact same problem in Colossae – that the believers there were being told – your faith in Christ is not enough! If you really want to be saved you must eat this and don’t drink that; you must honor the New Moon Celebration but don’t worship on that day, and Whoa! Don’t touch that, and No, No, No – don’t drink this. By the way, you must flog your body 3 times a day because our Lord Jesus Christ was flogged, and you must remember to honor your Guardian Angels each morning because the Bible says “He gives his angels charge over you” If you don’t honor them they may not protect you as well as they could. Remember to always close your prayers with the words “In Jesus Name” otherwise they don’t have any power . . . “ and on and on the list went!

Colossae, the city, was not too far away from Ephesus, about 100 miles inland from the coast in what is modern day Turkey. It was not a very large town, infact it was probably the smallest and most insignificant commercial center that Paul wrote to. Surprisingly however, this letter is probably the queen of the epistles lifts up the risen Christ and shows him for who he truly is. Not only that but Paul infact wrote 2 letters to be delivered to this town because Philemon lived in the town of Colossae and when his runaway slave Onesimus got saved and was to return to his master, Paul sent him with an accompanying letter pleading for mercy.

Colossae was also very closely situated to Laodicea and Hierapolis, 2 larger towns in the same valley, and both mentioned in this letter (4:13) ¹³ *I vouch for him that he is working hard for you and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis..*

The Church in Colossae had not been started by Paul, though he knew some people there, it was most probably started by Epaphras, who had been Paul's co-worker, possibly when Paul was in Ephesus ministering there. It seems as though Epaphras had gone back to Colossae, his home, planted a church there, and taught the disciples.

⁷ *You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf,*

The Crisis : Now Paul was in prison, most probably in Rome, and Epaphras had come to see him with somewhat disturbing news, that the believers in Colossae stood the chance of being led astray by new teachers who seemed to dispute Epaphras teaching, and instead had their own. They even seemed to be disputing Epaphras, and questioning his credibility, so that Paul has to speak out on his behalf twice in this letter, especially in 4:12 *Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of*

God, mature and fully assured. ¹³ I vouch for him that he is working hard for you and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis.

And so Paul wrote. We do not know exactly what these new teachers in town were teaching, but from the text we can infer that there were 3 dangers that the Colossians stood at

1. First they promised a **deeper fullness** if you followed their teachings. Paul writes and calls this teaching "hollow and deceptive philosophies" and goes on to tell the Colossians that there is no deeper fullness because Christ has given us all the fullness there is!
2. Secondly they promised a **deeper freedom** for any who followed after their teaching. The teaching itself seemed to offer deeper freedom from demonic powers and principalities if one worshiped in a certain way. But Paul writes and says in 2:13 *When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, ¹⁴ having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.*
There is no greater freedom than what Christ has already won for us
3. Thirdly they offered a **deeper spirituality**. These teachers were known for their impressive asceticism – fasting for example, seems to have been highly commended if not commanded. But, once again Paul writes and says in 2:22 *These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. ²³ Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false*

humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

In other words such strict regulations taught by these teachers DID NOT deliver deeper spirituality, it only delivered bondage to human laws because it was not rooted in Christ. There is nothing wrong with fasting and with discipline, but if it's foundation is not Christ, then it is useless.

Now all this sounds strangely familiar and strangely Kenyan. Why is it that so many flock to hear the latest phenomenon in town? It's because we often hunger for anything that promises **Deeper Fullness** in our Christian Walk, **Deeper Freedom** or **Deeper Spirituality**. And Satan knows this, and so he is constantly churning out new teachings, new doctrines, new avenues that promise these things BUT deliver only bondage. And he does not often go for the un-believers, he goes for born-again believers. Unfortunately for many of those who rush to follow and sample these new avenues, they do not often stop to ask "*What teaching is this? Why have we not heard of it before? And what do these teachers believe?*"

By the time they discover their error it is too late, if they quit, they are often so burned out and disillusioned that they don't just quit the church or cult, they quit the faith altogether; and in the end Satan has won.

III – Church Of Christ

So what do we do? We genuinely hunger for **Deeper Fullness** in our Christian Walk, for **Deeper Freedom** and for **Deeper Spirituality**. Is it wrong? No. Hunger for those things, but the answer lies, as Paul tells us in Ch 2 of this book, in Christ! As we study Colossians in coming weeks we will see how we can have these things without going into error.

What is the book of Colossians about and why did God protect and ensure that this book was transmitted to us today? The central theme of Colossians is given in 1:18 *And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.* This is the key verse. 3 words can be drawn from the verse

*he is the head of the body, the church - **Head***

*he is the beginning and the firstborn - **Preeminence***

*in everything he might have the supremacy - **Supremacy***

In different ways Colossians says, the rallying cry is

Christ is the Head!

Christ is Supreme!

Christ is Preeminent!

And because this is so, **Christ is sufficient** – he is all we need for full salvation. Let me give you one last birds eye view of Colossians. This is the way the book as a whole holds together . . .

Christ's Redemptive Work Is Sufficient!

His Redemptive Work Declared

Sermon 1. In The Colossians' salvation

Sermon 2. In God's Action

Sermon 3. In Paul's Ministry

A Man Commissioned

A Man Called

A Man In Labor

His Redemptive Work Defended

Sermon 4. Against Empty Philosophies

Sermon 5. Against Fake Religiosity

Sermon 6. Against Human Legalism

His Redemptive Work Demonstrated

Sermon 7. By our Character

Sermon 8. By Our Relationships

Sermon 9. By Our Ministry

Dependent in Prayer

Taking hold of every opportunity

Sacrificing for the brethren

This then is what a Birds Eye View of Colossians looks like. Next week we begin our walk thru the forest examining the parts, beginning first with Christ's Redemptive work declared thru the Colossians salvation, seeing together how the Gospel, with it's five fold dynamics as Paul gives them to us in Vs 1-8, declares the completed work of Christ. And then how the Colossians own conversion, and their subsequent testimony shows that Christ is sufficient.

Now, when we finish walking thru the book, a 9 wks study, we will walk back thru it, but this time looking at the thots, gems, themes, truths Paul teaches but doesn't necessarily develop. For example last week I looked at one "Paul, an Apostle . . ."

We will look at Col 1:1 – 8 where Paul talks about the Faith, Love and Hope; and about "The Secret of phenomenal Growth", about "The God we're all looking for", and the "4 keys of true forgiveness"; and why it is that so many believers are going around "Topless". These will be a set of devotional sermons over a period of 20 weeks. The devotional sermons will be :

1. Who Are You? 1:1
2. Faith, Love Hope – These 3 Remain. 1:3 - 8
3. The Secret To Phenomenal Growth 1:9 – 12
4. The Domain Of Darkness & Evil 1:13 – 14
5. The God You're Looking For 1:15 – 20
6. Are You God's Enemy? 1:21 – 23

7. Treasure Hunting: Grow Rich 1:24 – 2:5
8. One Step After The Cross 2:6 – 7
9. Buried Alive 2:9 – 12
10. 4 Keys To True Forgiveness 2:13 – 15
11. Living In The Shadowland 2:16 – 17
12. Going Around Topless 2:18 – 19
13. Walt Disney's "Listen To Your Heart . . ." 3:1 – 4
14. Put Your Old Man To Death 3:5 – 11
15. You've Got Attitude! 3:12 – 17
16. Roles Or Poles 3:18 – 21
17. A Redeemed Work Ethic 3:22 – 4:1
18. "Grab That One . . .!" 4:2 – 6
19. Being Grace Givers 4:7 – 15
20. "Complete The Work" 4:17

But in conclusion for today, let me leave you with one of the deep gems I was left with in my study of Colossians. One of the first things that struck me about Paul in writing to the church.

III – **Yellow** instead of Yellow