

Colossae

The Ancient City Speaks Today



How Should We Approach Bible Study?

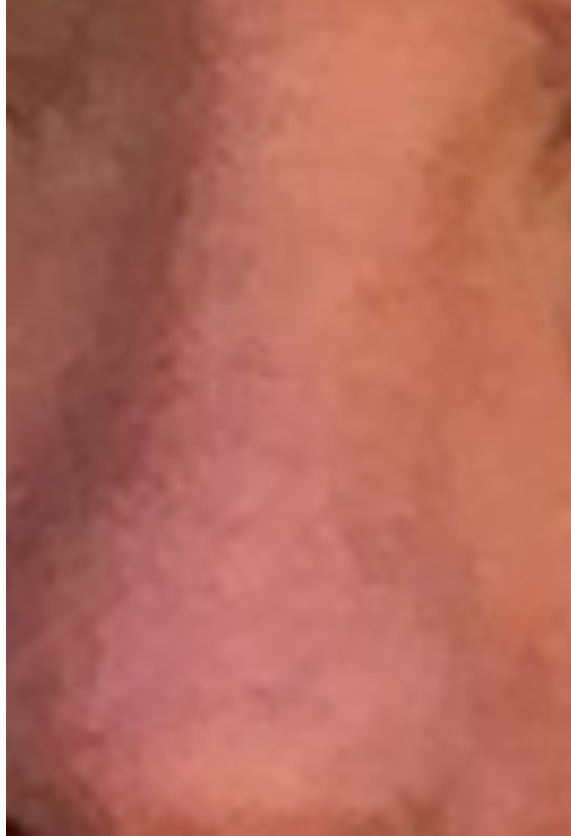
1. It is a **metanarrative** a “big story,” the all-encompassing theme of the whole.

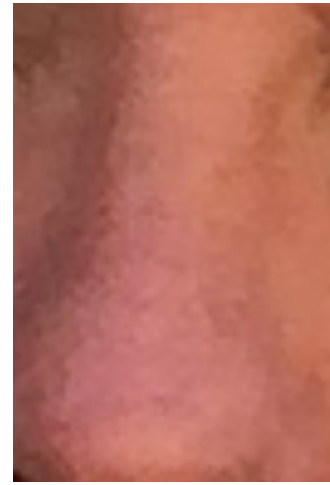
And as NT Wright says, “the bible story is important because it is the divine drama told in Scripture, and it offers a story which is the story of the whole world.”

How Should We Interpret the Bible?

- 2) The rule of **DEFINITION**: What does the word mean? Any study of Scripture must begin with a study of words.
- 2) The rule of **USAGE**:
- 3) The rule of **CONTEXT**: The meaning must be gathered from the context- No verse of Scripture can be divorced from the verses around it. The bible was not written in a vacuum.
- 4) The rule of **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**: The interpreter must have some awareness of the life and society of the times in which the Scripture was written.
- 5) The rule of **LOGIC**: Interpretation is merely logical reasoning.
- 6) The rule of **GENRE JUDGMENT**: the Bible contains a variety of literary genres, with peculiar characteristics that must be recognized in order to interpret the text properly.
- 7) The rule of dependence upon the **HOLY SPIRIT**: Scripture tells us that we are to rely on the Holy Spirit's illumination to gain insights into the meaning and application of Scripture (John 16:12-15, 1 Corinthians 2:9-11)

What is this???





**Interpreting a verse
apart from its context
is like trying to
analyze a picture by
looking at only a
single square inch.
Context is everything.**

Colossians

- Today the church faces a myriad of philosophies and ideologies; cultural relativism, universalism, Gnosticism, and syncretism to name a few.
- *Cultural relativism*- is the idea that a person's beliefs and activities should be understood based on that person's own culture, rather than judged against the criteria of another.
- *Universalism*- If God really was "good", then of course He would let everyone into heaven, right? Christians may be attracted to the idea and to want to justify it because they cannot see how God could send nice people to hell just for not believing.
- *Antinomianism*-the view that Christians are released by grace from the obligation of observing the moral law.
- *Syncretism*- the combination of different forms of belief or practice" (Webster's)
- *Gnosticism*-

So even though the book of Colossians was written over 2000 years ago it continues to speak a relevant word for the church today. We can gain helpful insights for living in a post Christian, post modern world

Today we will cover:

- The City
- Date of Epistle
- Author of Epistle
- Reason for the letter
- Outline
- Key Phrases
- Warnings
- Affirmations

The City

- Several hundred years before Paul's day, Colosse had been a leading city in Asia Minor (present-day Turkey).
- It was located on the Lycus River and on the great east-west trade route leading from Ephesus on the Aegean Sea to the Euphrates River
- Phrygian Cities- 3 important cities Laodicea, Hierapolis, Colosse, now a part of the Roman empire
- It was an area where there were many Jews (who had been transported to region many years before, (some 2,000 families), they prospered, many more came... rigorous Jews lamented over what had come of these Jewish families as they were accused of leaving the rigors of the faith and ancestral land for the wine and baths of Phrygia
- By the first century Colosse was diminished to a second-rate market town, which had been surpassed long before in power and importance by the neighboring towns of Laodicea and Hierapolis.
- An earthquake in 60-61 AD devastated Colosse and the city was not rebuilt

Date & Demographic

- 60-63 A.D.
- Colosse was mostly a pagan city, with a strong intermingling of Jews
- (in 62 B.C., there were 11,000 Jewish freemen in the tri-city area).
- This may explain the nature of some of the problems that arose among the church in Colosse (problems with both pagan and Jewish origin).
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The Author

- Paul & Timothy— 1:1-2
- Paul probably dictated it to Timothy.
- Epaphrus – Church planter 1:7
- Colossians is one of Paul's Prison Epistles- He had a where people could come and visit however the house was under the Guard of Praetorian soldiers.
- Paul was granted some rather unusual liberties, nonetheless, he was still a prisoner.
- His imprisonment imposes considerable stress. Hence, in his correspondence, he refers to himself as “the prisoner of Christ” (Eph. 3:1) or “the prisoner of the Lord” (Eph. 4:1), who is an “ambassador in chains” (6:20).
- Chains were commonly viewed as an object of shame (cf. 2 Tim. 1:16). Note the multiple references to his “bonds” or to his state as a “prisoner” (Phil. 1:7, 13, 14, 17; Col. 4:18; Phile. 1, 9, 23).
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Reason For The Letter

The young church had become the target of heretical attack, by what Paul refers to as “false teachers”.

They received the grace of Christ, but found themselves in further turmoil. False teachings, mysticism, empty philosophies, legalism, and were threatening the health and wellbeing of the members and their evangelistic opportunities. They were under siege by false teachers and prideful men seeking sensationalism and mysticism rather than Christ as Lord. Christ's Deity was being challenged and rejected.

There was an imminent threat to church that Heresy would become epidemic

Therefore the central theme of Paul's letter is that humans cannot achieve salvation through their own works, ideas, or accomplishments; we can't “improve” Christianity by adding to it ideas or philosophies from other sources, no matter how well-intentioned they are; Christianity is not syncretistic. Paul's letter to the Colossians reminds us that there is absolute truth in Christ.

OUTLINE

Introduction ([1:1–14](#))

Greetings ([1:1–2](#))

Thanksgiving ([1:3–8](#))

Prayer ([1:9–14](#))

The Supremacy of Christ ([1:15–23](#))

Paul's Labor for the Church ([1:24–2:7](#))

His Ministry for the Sake of the Church ([1:24–29](#))

His Concern for the Spiritual Welfare of His Readers ([2:1–7](#))

Freedom from Human Regulations through Life with Christ ([2:8–23](#))

Warning to Guard against the False Teachers ([2:8–15](#))

Pleas to Reject the False Teachers ([2:16–19](#))

An Analysis of the Heresy ([2:20–23](#))

Rules for Holy Living ([3:1–4:6](#))

The Old Self and the New Self ([3:1–17](#))

Rules for Christian Households ([3:18–4:1](#))

Further Instructions ([4:2–6](#))

Final Greetings and Benediction ([4:7–18](#))

The book of Colossians is an anthem and presentation of the Apostle Paul's Christology. What Christ is and what He has done for us is enough for salvation. We need no other extra mediators, taboos or ascetics. To piece out the gospel with the bits and pieces of other ideologies does not enrich the gospel, but it corrupts the gospel.

Key Phrases

- We tell others... warning everywhere and teaching with all the wisdom of God
- Don't drift away from the assurance you have received- 1:23
- See that no one deceive you with well crafted arguments– 2:4
- Don't Let anyone capture you with empty philosophies and high sounding nonsense that comes from human thinking and from the spiritual powers of this world- 2:8
- Don't let anyone condemn you for what you eat or drink... 2:16
- Don't let anyone condemn you by insisting on pious self-denial or the worship of angels. 2-

The Problem of SYNCRETISM

Perhaps the reason there no one specific name for the heresies was due to the syncretistic nature of the problem in that, it was an eclectic blend of Jewish legalism, Greek philosophic speculation, and oriental mysticism, ancient paganism combined together with a Christian element. It did not *deny* Christ, but it did *dethrone* him. It gave Christ a place, but not the supreme place. This Christian facade made the Colossian error all the more dangerous.

Paul was not dealing with the components of just one false teacher and heresy but appears to be a mish mash of heresy. All the features found in this problem at Colossae would later be found in full-blown Gnosticism. So it may have been an incipient form of Gnosticism combined with elements of Judaism.

WARNINGS

Paul issues several warning to the Colossians

WARNING AGAINST FOLLOWING EMPTY PHILOSOPHY(2:8-10)

“Be careful that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit based on human tradition, based on the elemental forces of the world, and not based on Christ.”

WARNING AGAINST JUDAISTIC CEREMONIALISM(2:11-17)

In Christ you have a circumcision made without hands (2:11-12)

You are made alive in Christ, and the handwriting of requirements that was against us has been taken away at the cross (2:13-15) Therefore don't let anyone judge you in regards to food, festivals, or Sabbath days
(2:16-17)

WARNINGS

WARNING AGAINST ANGELWORSHIP(2:18-19)

Don't let anyone defraud you of your reward by appealing to angel worship and imagined visions of a fleshly mind (2:18) Such people do not hold fast to Christ as the Head, and from whom true divine nourishment comes (2:19)

WARNING AGAINST ASCETICISM-the doctrine that a person can attain a high spiritual and moral state by practicing self-denial, self-mortification, and the like. "Don't handle, Don't taste, Don't touch." a heresy out to limit Christian freedom,

Having died with Christ to the world, there is no need to submit to human ordinances (2:20-22)

While having appearances of wisdom, such practices have no value in controlling the indulgences of the flesh (2:23)

WARNING AGAINST EMBRACING JEWISH ELEMENTS

Talk of new moons and Sabbaths laws about food and drink where essentially Jewish Levitical laws...

WARNINGS

WARNING AGAINST GNOSTICISM- **Gnosticism**- a syncretistic tendency that combined certain more or less misunderstood Christian doctrines and various elements from oriental, Jewish, Greek, and other sources;

- It did not *deny* Christ, but it did *dethrone* him. It gave Christ a place, but not the supreme place. This Christian facade made the Colossian error all the more dangerous.
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- In other words, it taught that Christ was insufficient and that one must go beyond Christ into the fullness of what they had to offer.

Gnosticism

- (1) a claim on the part of the initiated to a special knowledge of the truth...
- (2) the essential separation of matter and spirit, matter being intrinsically evil and the source from which all evil has arisen;
- (3) an attempt to solve the problems of creation and the origin of evil by advancing the theory of a creator of the world distinct from the deity...
- (4) a denial of the true humanity of Christ;
- (5) the denial of the personality of the Supreme God, and the denial of the free will of mankind;
- (6) the teaching, on the one hand, of asceticism as the means of attaining spiritual communion with God, and, on the other hand, of an indifference that led directly to license ;
- (7) salvation obtained not through faith but through knowledge
- (8) the knowledge they spoke of was obtained only through mystical experiences

Paul's Affirmations

Christ as the Answer to All the Colossians' Concerns

- In Christ (1:2)-In Him used 150 times in Pauline letters
- Knowledge & Wisdom (1:9-10, 2:3)
- Qualified (1:13)
- Rescued and Transferred (1:13-14)
- God made Visible (1:15)
- Access (1: 22)
- Reconciled to God (1:22)
- Holy & blameless & without fault (1:22)
- Deep mysteries revealed (kept secret but now revealed) (1:26-27, 2:2-3)
- Complete (2:10)
- Union (2:10)
- Fullness (2:9)



Conclusion

In Colossians 2:9-15. Christ is presented as the antidote.

Without Jesus as our absolute foundation, Christology runs the risk of becoming distorted undermining the being and character of God and of His salvation for man found in Christ alone.

- There can be no neutrality toward Christ, he is God made visible.
- There can be no neutrality about His deity... the fullness of deity dwells in Christ.
- There can be no neutrality about and what He has done for us.
- Therefore, there can be no neutrality about who we are in Him.

Gnosticism

