

Colossians Bible Study, Detailed Outline

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1. Introduction to Colossians

- a. The City of Colosse (or Colossae)
 - i. located 12 miles SE of Laodicea and Hierapolis, approximately 100 miles E of Ephesus, on E-W travel route, a commercial city in the ancient world, noted for production and trade of wool
 - ii. Laodicea had eclipsed Colosse in wealth in Roman times, indeed was exceedingly wealthy, Cf. Revelation 3:17
 - iii. located in the region (province) of Phrygia in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey)
 - iv. Colosse was destroyed in an earthquake in 63 AD and rebuilt, but finally completely abandoned, and is an archaeological site near the town of Honaz (Chonas), Turkey
- b. The Church at Colosse
 - i. Though Paul may have visited there on his 3rd missionary journey (Acts 18:23, 19:1), it is unlikely that he founded the church there (2:1)
 - ii. Evidence within Colossians points to Epaphras as founder of the Colossian Church (1:7, 4:12)
 - iii. Notwithstanding, the Apostle Paul had recognized authority by the church there (1:7-8, 4:7-12)
- c. Authorship and Date
 - i. Written by the Apostle Paul (1:1) from prison in Rome (4:18)
 - ii. Date: during Paul's first Roman imprisonment (61-62 AD)
 - iii. Closely correlated with Paul's Letter to Philemon (Compare Colossians 1:1 with Philemon 1:1, Colossians 4:9-10 with Philemon 12, Colossians 4:10-17 with Philemon 2, 23-24)
- d. Occasion for Writing and Themes
 - i. Occasion: to refute Judeo-Gnostic (pseudo-Christian) heresy which was infiltrating the church at Colosse, this teaching was a blend of Pharisaic Judaism and Gnostic human philosophy
 - ii. Themes are: Doctrine of Christ, Doctrine of Christian Practice

2. Greeting: 1:1-8

- a. 1:1, “Paul” identifies himself as an “apostle”, contrast with “bondservant” (Philippians 1:1), indicating by what authority he instructs and corrects the church regarding doctrine
- b. “Timothy” the Pastor at Ephesus (1 Timothy 1:3), Paul’s protégé
- c. 1:2, letter is addressed to “the saints” (i.e. those who are set apart by and for the Lord Jesus, all true believers), “faithful brethren” is an equivalent term
- d. “Grace, Peace” invoked, divine unmerited favor, and the peace that flows for its receipt via fellowship with God through Christ Jesus
- e. 1:3, prayer for the church enjoined
- f. 1:4, “love for all the saints” as proof of the genuineness of the Christian profession of the church, and of you and I also (Cf. 1 John 4:20-21), never in the Book of Acts or in the NT Epistles do we ever find Christians disassociating from the church (Cf. Hebrews 10:24-25), Apply: based on Scripture principle, are such truly saved?
- g. 1:4-5, the “faith” is based upon the “hope” of unseen reward, in response to the preaching “of the truth of the gospel” (Cf. Hebrews 11:1; Romans 10:6-17)
- h. 1:6, “which has come to you” in Gentile regions, and “also in all the world” (Isaiah 45:22)
- i. 1:7, “Epaphras” was probably the founder of the Colossian Church, mentioned here, in 4:12, and Philemon 23
- j. 1:8, the valid report of the spiritual love of the brethren at Colosse, the heart of the church was right, but as we shall see, the doctrine of the church was being attacked and even compromised in some circles, Apply: both loving heart and true doctrine are necessary

3. Doctrine of Christ: 1:9-2:23

- a. 1:9, prayer for the infant church, and (applied) for the infant believer for knowledge, wisdom, and spiritual understanding
 - i. Prayer is the first practical service, but other active steps must accompany this (Cf. Hebrews 5:12-6:2), Paul effects this by power of prayer, power of the pen, personal discipleship of

- church leaders, and seeking to create a culture conducive to spiritual knowledge, wisdom, and understanding
- ii. Apply: the superficial church of today with its worldly entertainment and program driven model, teaching to the ‘least common denominator’, and spirit of compromise and acceptance of sin will never achieve this
- b. 1:10, outward spiritual fruitfulness the result of inward spiritual renewal, consistent walk with one’s Christian profession enjoined (Cf. Ephesians 4:1)
 - i. Spiritual learning applied, the knowledge of true doctrine cannot be divorced from Christian life application
 - ii. The goal of the Christian, “fully pleasing Him” and not man, actions should be evaluated based whether they meet this higher objective
- c. 1:11, Cf. John 15:4-5,16, both the inward and the outward achieved in the divine strength
 - i. Apply: avoiding the entrance of pride into our knowledge of doctrine and/or our good works, both can be dangers, no ministry/church/saint operates independently of Christ
- d. 1:12, “partakers of the inheritance”, spiritual heritage of God’s people a source of encouragement
 - i. 1 Peter 1:3-4, the permanence of the believer’s spiritual heritage gives him/her peace and security, mitigating the extremes of guilt and shame of sin through knowing the extent of divine forgiveness (Cf. Ephesians 1:7-11; Acts 26:18—as Segway to the next 2 verses)
- e. 1:13, divine deliverance from our default kingdom (Cf. Romans 3:23, 6:23) to Christ’s Kingdom
 - i. Deliverance from the power of dark hearts, dark minds, and dark works done for dark motives—an ungodly person simply cannot do light deeds for light motives (Cf. 1 Corinthians 2:14; Ephesians 2:1; John 15:5)
- f. 1:14, Cf. Hebrews 9:11-15 (exposits/expounds upon this verse)

- g. Special Study #1: Forgiveness of Sins, a Volley of Texts
 - i. OT Shadow: Leviticus 5:10; Psalm 32:1, 65:3, 103:3, 130:4; Ezekiel 18:22
 - ii. NT Reality: Matthew 6:14; Mark 3:28; Acts 5:31, 13:38, 26:18; Ephesians 1:7; James 5:15; 1 John 1:9
 - iii. If God has so forgiven you, Christian friend, why then will you refuse to accept His forgiveness (pride), refuse to forgive others (pride), or refuse the forgiveness of others (pride)?
- h. 1:15, “image of the invisible God”, not as man is but is the exact representation of the Father, being God Himself (Cf. Hebrews 1:3)
- i. “firstborn” does not mean first created, but preeminent (Cf. 1:18), note He is “over all creation” and therefore set above and apart from all created things
- j. 1:16, Christ the Agent of Creation, the “memra” (John 1:1-3)
- k. The purpose of all creation, for God’s Glory, give examples regarding self and various aspects of creation (i.e. the natural world)
- l. 1:17, eternity of Jesus Christ (Cf. Hebrews 7:1-3; Revelation 22:13)
- m. 1:18, “the body, the church”, Cf. 1 Corinthians 12:12-27
- n. “firstborn from the dead”, Cf. 1 Corinthians 15:20-28
- o. 1:19-23, Reconciled in Christ
 - i. The basis and means of the reconciliation
 - 1. 1:19, the divine Mediator (Cf. 1 Timothy 2:5)
 - 2. 1:20, “the blood of His cross”
 - 3. 1:22, “the body of His flesh”
 - 4. 1:23, the preaching of the gospel
 - ii. The order of the effecting of reconciliation
 - 1. Divine initiative
 - 2. Faith response
 - iii. Perseverance as evidence of salvation
 - 1. 1:23, “if” is something that is done by true believers, the truly faithful will persevere to the end, but the pretenders will eventually fall by the wayside
 - 2. The need to be “grounded and steadfast”, so as not to be picked off easily (Cf. Matthew 13:1-23; 1 Peter 5:8-9)

- p. 1:24, “rejoice in my sufferings”, seeing the beneficial nature for others of our trials and circumstances (opportunity to witness when one cannot otherwise do so, as the man with cancer can witness to oncology patients who would not listen to a well man)
- q. “His body...the church”, the church as the Body of Christ and a called out assembly of believers
- r. 1:25, our ministries a stewardship (Cf. 1 Corinthians 4:1-2; 1 Peter 4:10), Paul’s specific ministry as an example (preaching “the word of God”, Cf. 1 Corinthians 9:17-18)
- s. 1:26-29, the “mystery” of the gospel of Jesus Christ revealed, having formerly been concealed in the OT days, three duties:
 - i. “make known”
 - ii. “warning”
 - iii. “teaching”
- t. Note that these three are the sum of preaching in public assembly and private evangelism, considering how you would share “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (the Lord and His gospel dwell within every blood bought, born again believer)
- u. 2:1, Cf. 2 Corinthians 11:28 in context, note also the implication that Paul likely never visited Colosse, although Laodicea perhaps
- v. 2:2-3, insight into the specific content of Paul’s prayer for the church
 - i. Encouragement of heart
 - ii. Unity (in context of Colossians 1-2, includes doctrinally)
 - iii. Brotherly Love
 - iv. Full assurance of the faith (its truth and its end)
 - v. Understanding of the Person of Jesus Christ and the way in which He reveals the Father (Cf. John 14:7-11)
- w. 2:4-7, “deceive you with persuasive words” is to be combatted by being “rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith”, done by private prayer, Bible reading and study, and daily practice, supplemented and informed by sound church preaching/teaching
 - i. Apply: there are always those who go about teaching falsehoods, which rob men and women of their peace

- x. 2:8, “philosophy” of the worldly wise man, “tradition of men” of either the Pharisaical or academic variety, “basic principles of the world” are diametrically opposed to those of Christ, as illustrated by the contrast of worldly and divine wisdom
- y. Special Study #2: Worldly vs. Divine Wisdom, A Volley of Texts,
 - i. Worldly Wisdom: Isaiah 47:10; Jeremiah 4:22, 8:9; Romans 1:22; 1 Corinthians 3:19-20; James 3:15
 - ii. Divine Wisdom: Deuteronomy 32:29; Job 28:18; Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 2:6; Luke 21:15; 2 Timothy 3:15; James 1:5, 3:17
- z. 2:9, the deity of Christ affirmed here
 - i. “all the fullness”, equality of divine nature with the Father (Cf. John 10:30; 1 Timothy 3:16)
 - ii. “of the Godhead”, plurality in the Godhead, this is one of the strongest verses affirming the doctrine of the Trinity alongside Matthew 28:19 and 2 Corinthians 13:14
 - iii. “bodily”, Cf. John 1:14, the Incarnation of God the Son
- aa. 2:10, spiritual fullness is found in Christ, without Whom we are spiritually incomplete, satisfaction of our deepest needs found in Him (Cf. Matthew 5:6; John 15:11; Ephesians 3:19; Colossians 1:9 which begins the first major division of the book, “Doctrine of Christ”)
- bb. 2:11-12, Spiritual Circumcision and Baptism
 - i. Physical Circumcision, Genesis 17:10-11, Physical Baptism, Matthew 3:11, both outward signs of inward participation in a covenant with God (old and new, respectively)
 - ii. Spiritual Circumcision, “without hands”, spiritual renewal, forsaking of sin, “by the circumcision of Christ” (based upon His work)
 - iii. Spiritual Baptism, “through faith”, same as baptism of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:11)
- cc. 2:13, “dead in your trespasses” (Cf. Ephesians 2:1; 1 Corinthians 2:14), “uncircumcision of your flesh” spiritually true regardless of whether one is a participant of the Abrahamic Covenant

- dd. “forgiven you all trespasses”, Cf. Hebrews 7:27, key on “all”
 - i. Cf. Psalm 32:1-2, 103:12; Isaiah 43:25; John 5:24; Hebrews 7:27, 10:12; 1 John 1:7-9, 2:2
 - ii. What about the “unpardonable sin” of Matthew 12:31-32?
 - 1. “blasphemy against the Spirit” is what it is, nothing more, nothing less
 - 2. Yet, “blasphemy” against God the Holy Spirit was forgivable for Paul (1 Timothy 1:12-13).
 - 3. Which trespasses were forgiven? Our text says “all.” Therefore the unpardonable sin is not an individual sin that one can commit today, but rather a national sin leading to judgment for unbelieving Messiah-rejecting Israel in that day (“this (wicked) generation” is a recurring phrase in Matthew Chapter 12), for further reference see the paper at www.firmfoundationri.com
- ee. 2:14, the ceremonial law no longer a requirement,
 - i. Cf. Galatians 4:4-7; Matthew 5:17; Hebrews 7:12 in context of that entire book, the NT exposition of the meaning and fulfillment (in many aspects) of Leviticus
- ff. 2:15, Christ the Victor
 - i. Cf. Genesis 3:15; Isaiah 53:12; John 19:30; Romans 1:4 (the public nature of His ministry, life, and resurrection), with a view to 1 Corinthians 15:24 and Revelation 6:2, 17:14, 21:7 yet to come in time
 - ii. Notice also against whom Christ gained the victory (Cf. Ephesians 6:12)
- gg. 2:16-17, Re: Legalistic observance of the Ceremonial Law
 - i. Observance is to voluntary, not mandatory, and is not to be judged either way in the NT economy
 - ii. Observance of any aspect(s) of the ceremonial law is okay, so long as it is understood that it was never a means of salvation (Cf. Habakkuk 2:4; Galatians 3:24, 4:5, 5:1-6; James 2:10)

- hh. Special Study #3: The Sabbath: Must we observe it today?
 - i. Not a Creation Ordinance but rather a divine example, which would later give occasion and basis for the Mosaic command: Genesis 2:2; Exodus 20:11
 - ii. OT Background: Exodus 16:29-30, 20:8, 31:15; Leviticus 26:2
 - iii. Expansion upon Sabbath Law in the Talmud (Mishnah—Oral Law + Gemara—Exposition of Oral Law), 39 categories of work forbidden (Shabbat Laws)
 - iv. Christ’s teaching: Matthew 12:12; Mark 2:27-28; Luke 6:6; John 5:9, 7:23
 - v. NT Sabbath Gatherings: Acts 16:13, 17:2, 18:4
 - vi. NT Teaching: that the Sabbath was part of the Ceremonial Law in the OT economy, and that since Christ fulfilled this (ibid. ee, gg), its observance is no longer binding (Colossians 2:16; Romans 14:5-6), note the absence of any positive NT command to observe this specific day
 - vii. NT Gatherings: Basis (Resurrection), Cf. Matthew 28:1; John 20:19, Sunday became the normative day of worship for the church age, Cf. Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2
 - viii. MK Sabbath Observance: Memorial Services, Ezekiel 44:24
- ii. 2:18, “cheat you of your reward”, cannot be done to a believer, either with regard to salvation or heavenly reward (1 Peter 1:3-4; 1 Corinthians 3:14), but can be done by deception, playing upon pride and the carnal mind (Ephesians 5:6-7)
- Jj. 2:19, “the Head” is Christ, “the body” is the church, individual believers are “joints and ligaments”, “increase” is spiritual growth, and its source is from God Himself, not ourselves
- kk. 2:20, Special Study #4: “if you died with Christ”, Dying to Sin and Dying with Christ, The Surrendered Christian Life (Points 1-3 derived from Thompson’s Chain Reference Study Bible, 3503-3505)
 - i. Dying to Sin (Romans 6:2,7,11; Galatians 2:20, 5:24; Colossians 3:3; 2 Timothy 2:11; 1 Peter 2:24)

- ii. Dying with Christ (Romans 6:6, 8:36; 2 Corinthians 4:11; Galatians 6:14)
 - iii. Examples from Scripture (Noah, Genesis 6:22; Elisha, 1 Kings 19:20; David, Psalm 40:8; Isaiah, Isaiah 6:8; Christ, John 4:34; Paul, Acts 9:6)
 - iv. Contrary Examples from Scripture (Matthew 19:21-22; Luke 9:62)
- LI. 2:20-23, warnings to the Colossian Christians: to avoid empty ceremonialism (apply: liturgy without heart worship), formalism (additional man made regulations which are a denial of Christian liberty), exalting traditions above Scripture (Cf. Matthew 15:1-9), asceticism taken to the extreme or to make a show (“neglect of the body”, Cf. Matthew 6:16-18), impure motivations that do not result in holier living

4. Doctrine of Christian Practice: 3:1-4:18

- a. 3:1-4, holy ambitions and affections enjoined, in contrast to those things “of no value against the indulgence of the flesh” (Colossians 2:23), Note the parallels between the Christian ambitions and the death, burial (“hidden with Christ”), and resurrection of Christ
- b. “Christ” emphasizes the Risen Lord, His deity
- c. 3:5, “put to death”, having died with Christ through being born again (note the paradox between Colossians 3:3 and John 3:3, the death is that of the old spiritual nature which opposes God, Cf. Romans 6-8)
 - i. “fornication”, unlawful sex, lustful thoughts and behavior
 - ii. “uncleanness”, morally impure habits and lifestyle
 - iii. “passion”, a neutral term, but sinful in context
 - iv. “evil desire”, to desire those things which are in opposition, either in thought or deed, to the last five of the Ten Commandments
 - v. “covetousness”, and specifically the 10th (Exodus 20:17)
 - vi. “which is idolatry”, to exclude worship of God in favor of “the indulgence of the flesh” (Colossians 2:23)
 - vii. Spiritual surgery enjoined (Cf. Matthew 5:29-30)

- d. 3:6, “wrath of God”, divine vengeance against all sin and unrighteousness, as an attribute of God it is related to His justice (judgment) and holiness, hundreds of reference in the Scriptures to it, both OT and NT (Psalm 2:12; John 3:36; Romans 1:18)
- e. “sons of disobedience”, these are the children of the devil, there are two spiritual fathers (John 8:37-44), the natural father (of all men, Psalm 51:5) and the heavenly Father (Matthew 6:9; Romans 8:12-17), 3:7, into whose family believers have been adopted
- f. 3:8-9, removal of the filthy garments of sinful intent and action
 - i. “anger”, tantamount to murder of the heart, Matthew 5:21-22
 - ii. “wrath”, unrighteous and unjust anger (human wrath is the opposite of divine wrath because it is rooted in sin rather than holiness)
 - iii. “malice”, ill will towards another, evil intent, injurious thoughts and behaviors towards others
 - iv. “blasphemy”, violation of the 3rd Commandment (Exodus 20:7)
 - v. “filthy language”, coarse, suggestive, destructive, unedifying
 - vi. “lie to one another”, Christian relationships should be built on trust, Cf. Matthew 5:37
- g. 3:10-11, spiritual renewal made available to all beginning with salvation and continuing unto (progressive) sanctification, effected by God the Holy Spirit (Cf. Romans 12:2; Titus 3:5), to the “image of Him who created him” (likeness of heavenly Father attributes, such as love, mercy, grace, justice, knowledge, wisdom, etc...)
- h. 3:12, “elect of God”, a title for Christians, if there are “elect” then there must be election (Cf. Ephesians 1:4; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; Romans 11:28)
- i. 3:12, having removed the garments of 3:8-9 (ibid. 4f), change into some new clothes, clean clothes
 - i. “tender mercies”, heart of compassion and empathy
 - ii. “kindness”, a lost art, discuss its meaning and practice
 - iii. “humility”, esteeming others above oneself (Philippians 2:5-8)
 - iv. “meekness”, not weakness but peacefully forbearing
 - v. “longsuffering”, patience with others, through trials

- j. 3:13: Special Study #5, Forgiveness
 - i. This text the most concise and comprehensive verse in the Bible on the subject, horizontal based on vertical, mandatory
 - ii. Divine forgiveness of the sins of men the result of the work of Christ (Ephesians 1:7)
 - iii. Continual forgiveness needed to maintain fellowship with God (1 John 1:9)
 - iv. Forgiveness of others a condition of our being forgiven and being in communion with the Lord (Matthew 6:14-15)
 - v. Are there limits to Christ's forgiveness? There being none, there ought to be no limits to ours (Matthew 18:21-35).
 - vi. Apply: forgiveness a condition of maintaining all our relationships—it releases us from bitterness of heart...if we choose to obey our text's command that we "must do" it
- k. 3:14, "love...the bond of perfection", the most abiding overarching attribute of God and (hopefully) us (1 Corinthians 13:4-7,13)
- l. 3:15, peace and thankfulness go hand in hand as fruits of obedient Christian living (discuss how)
- m. 3:16, personal and corporate worship
 - i. "word of Christ" (Scripture) preeminent, any other substitute is not Bible worship
 - ii. "teaching and admonishing" not only done in preaching, but is also a purpose of music ministry
 - iii. "Psalms" are the words of God, "hymns" are doctrinal teachings set to music, "spiritual songs" are applications of both of these rooted in Bible principles, Discuss: the songs in our hymn book, which are in each category?
 - iv. "singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord", with right spirit, acknowledging that it is only by God's grace that we have cause to sing
- n. 3:17, doing all to glorify God, our chief purpose (1 Corinthians 10:31)
- o. 3:18, wives to submit to the husband's headship in the marriage (as per divine appointment and order), Cf. Ephesians 5:22-24