

Note

Colossians – Part 1 of 1

Summary

Galatians - Part 1 of 1 2

One of the four prison epistles, very similar to Ephesians. The church was very likely started by Epapharous and the letter was written in response to some of his concerns. Tychichus brought the letter to the church. Colossae was like many modern cities, it had multiple influences on its culture and religion. Paul emphasises the central eternal truth that Christ is All and in all, the Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer, the image of the invisible Almighty, the Hope of Glory.

Transcript

Colossians – Part 1 of 1

We've come to the Epistle to the Colossians. This epistle is one of the four prison epistles that Paul wrote. The others are – Ephesians, Philippians, and Philemon.

You will find a lot of similarity between this epistle to the Colossians and the one to the Ephesians. They were probably written at the same time, and there are some things that Paul repeats here. I think there's a purpose because they're important. For example, Paul refers to the church in Ephesians as a body. In Colossians, he does the same, because we need this Koinonia, we need this partnership. Every one of us is important, and we should support one another. Then in Colossians, Paul tells us as Christians to sing to the Lord joyfully. In other words, we have an expressive faith, not purely a contemplative faith. A lot of people are so Christian that nobody knows they're a Christian because they study all day.

Then it also uses the metaphor put on, put off, which is how we have to live our Christian life. We need to put off our old habits so that the new habits can be put on. You cannot put new clothes on old clothes. And then in Colossians, we also see an emphasis on the family... the part of our Christian life, which we often neglect.

We like to look very Christian in church on Sunday, but behave unchristian at home. That's almost the norm. And that's why many children never want to be Christians because they see hypocrisy. Papa and mama look so religious on Sunday like the ideal couple, but at home they are the exact opposite. We need to live out our Christian faith at home and our main ministry should be our family.

Paul had never met these Colossian Christians. He did not start this church. Then why did he write this letter?

This church was started by one of his disciples, Epaphras. And then when he heard that Paul was in prison, he visited him, and shared with Paul the

problems that were in the Colossian church. So Paul wrote this letter to address these problems.

After Paul wrote this letter, it was carried by a person called Tychicus. He also probably carried the letter to the Philippians and the letter to Philemon.

Paul wrote to Philemon who is a member of this church.

Colosse is the western part of Turkey almost close to Europe. And it was kind of like a trade route into Europe. So it had Asian and European influence, with a very multi-ethnic population there. And because there were people from all over the world trading there, including Jews, they brought their religions there so there was no dominant religion in Colosse as opposed to certain other places.

Now in a sense, Colosse is very much like modern cities today, where we get influence from everywhere; Singapore being one classic example. But even if you are not a trading port, you get a lot of influence nowadays from internet. And therefore, a new religion has come up actually in the world that we do not realize. It's pervading everything that we do. It's a new age religion. It's everything global.

There's no book of doctrine for New Age. Anything can be added in, for example mother earth instead of Father God, - all these things are actually part of a new age movement and we don't realize it. And the people of Colosse didn't realize it. They were so influenced by the culture which had a lot of religious superstitions and practices.

So Paul had to write to them because they were not aware of it. Now, what is usually the problem? Why is it even Christians get stuck in New Age practices?

A lot of Christians are. Many of you listening are. The reason is, for most of us, God is high. Almost every so-called serious Christian knows that God is very high and holy. And other religions share the same thing. If you're serious about religion, one thing you know is, God is transcendent. He's above everything. He's different from everything, So we accept the transcendence of God. That's very easy to grasp, as opposed to idolatry. But the imminence, the very presence of God with us is hard to grasp.

How can God be high up, and with us? When we have this high view of God, we think we need a lot of intermediaries to fill this gap. So we have priestcraft coming in between; some will talk about angels....Some will say we have found a secret formula, we have this mystical religion that help us get closer to God. Some will say to get closer to God, we need some practices like fasting, observance of special days.... so all these mystical superstitions come in.

What Paul was basically addressing was that God is transcendent - high but in Christ, who is God, God is near. And if we have Christ, we don't need all those intermediaries, all those new age, mystery religions, to fill the gap between the High God and us. Christ is ALL we need. You will find the word ALL 31 times.

Chapter 1:9 ESV

And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with a knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

When Paul heard about them from Epaphras he starts to pray that they will be filled with all spiritual wisdom and understanding. If you don't have spiritual understanding and wisdom, you need to fill the gaps with whatever people tell you.

Chapter 1:11

Being strengthened, with all power, according to His glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father.

Now when people think we are filled with all the power of God according to his glorious might, we think this is for miracles. But when God gives us all power, it is not for showy things. There's a lot of showy Christianity. People like showmen because it sort of helps fill that gap between them and God. And that's why a lot of showmen come into the Christian faith.

I call it priests-craft or religious craft. These are men who make their living out of being the showmen, but it tells us 'being strengthened with all power....for what? For all endurance and patience with joy.

It sounds very mundane, it sounds very boring. That's what Christ wants us to have - that simple endurance, faithfully doing something. Long suffering is the word used in the King James, just going on helping

people, sharing the gospel, teaching, in not necessarily showy ways, but faithful, with joy, giving thanks. That's the Christian walk. It's like Christ every day, going from village to village, town to town, walking in the hot sun, doing good, meeting needs, blessing people, reflecting God with all endurance and patience.

This is the central part of the book.

Colossians Chapter 1, vs 15-20

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 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 are created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him, all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the first born from the dead, that in everything he might be pre eminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross.

I want you to note 'all'. What is Paul trying to tell the Colossians who are trying to find things that help them know God? He's telling them that Christ is all you need. If you know Christ, and you focus on Christ, you will have that union with God, you will have that satisfaction. You will have everything you need. You don't need to run here and there looking for the latest showman to help me to get closer to God, or where's the latest rally, or who is the greatest preacher, or scholar, seminar? That's what they're doing. Some good, some not so good, but looking everywhere except at Christ.

What do you mean by focus on Christ? Well, look at His life. And then remember Christ lives in you. Then, as you say Christ lives in me, help me try to live like you.

And if you focus on Christ living in you, and focus on you trying to live out the Christ in you, that's all you need. Now, let's just see a few things in these few verses.

V15

He is the image of the invisible God.

You want to know what God's like? Look at Christ's life. For by him all things were created. The Colossian Christians struggled with that. They

found it hard to imagine that carpenter's son was the creator of the world.

Verse 17 And He is before all things, and in Him, all things hold together.

The actual word is glued. Stuck. Now if you understand atomic power, you realize that the atom bomb is nothing more than the release of this 'glue' that holds the atoms together. Someone's holding these electrons together. I always wondered why, who, and then you read Colossians 1, the principle of atomic power! God holds it.

Verse 19

For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell

In Philippians, it's said he emptied Himself of the privileges but all the fullness of God dwells in Him. This is the central part. Paul is telling the Colossian Christians that they had a very low view of Christ. Do you think Christ is like one of the many religious stars, or maybe one of the many saints that other religions have brought in. No, no! He is God. Here we have this passage where Paul is trying to help the Colossian Christians grasp the transcendence of God. God came down as man, and walked among men, but also lives in man. Galatians 2:20 says Christ lives in us.

verse 27

To them, God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

What's the mystery? God is in heaven? No, we know that. Christ lives in us.

Christ lives in us through the Holy Spirit. So we are connected to God, we have the almighty God in the person of the Holy Spirit living in us. Hard to grasp. And that's why he says that's the hope.

Look at verse 27....the hope of glory. You want to live a life that glorifies God, it's possible. It's not wishful thinking, it's your hope. Why? Because Christ lives in you. Can you live out the life of Christ? Can you live like Christ? Why not? If Christ lives in me.

But look at verse 29

for this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

Sounds like a paradox. Paul says I toil. But it's His energy that works in me. Who's working there? Paul or Christ working in him? Combination. Paul toils by putting off his own nature, old habits so that the energy that works in him, the Christ that wants to shine through him, can be seen. It's a mystery.

But the reality that Paul wanted to tell the Colossians is - Why are you looking for super men in stadiums? Focus on Christ , He lives in you. Chapter 1 is the key.

Chapter 2:3

in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

We are running around trying to find all kinds of wisdom. We read looking for wisdom, but the greatest wisdom is knowing Christ lives in you. He's waiting to live through you, He's waiting to work his life through you. What kind of life? The life He lived on earth - with patience, endurance, being helpful, kind, reaching out, sacrificial - everything we're not. We know how to study in the comfort of our study. Do we know how to go out and endure, helping the poor, reaching out?

Chapter 2:8

See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits in the world, and not according to Christ,

So many are taken in by philosophy and human traditions. Isn't Christian faith full of traditions - certain days you can eat this, certain days cannot eat this, certain days you go to church-Easter, Christmas- all these are traditions. It's not the daily endurance, daily living out Christ. Little traditions here and there -light some lights here, put some candles there, abstain from certain things at certain times- that's our Christianity.

Chapter 2:9

For in Him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily

In Christ whom you thought was insufficient, and you needed the flashy people and fancy ideas.

Chapter 2:11

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 Jews circumcised the foreskin of the male organ, it's like putting off a bit of flesh. But when we receive Christ, we have a spiritual circumcision of our old nature, that sinful nature that had power over us. In the past, we could not say, I don't want to live this way because you don't even have a desire to do that. But today, you have the desire, and you have the power of Christ to overcome that old nature of yours.

Chapter 2:16-19

Therefore, let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival, or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.

Basically, it is saying that you don't need all those things like special days where you think it's more religious, to be closer to God. And we don't need to be near a man who had visions to be close to God. I don't need to travel hundreds of miles to listen to godly men preach (these may be good men), or visit the Holy land to be more holy, because Christ lives in me. I don't get more holy just by shaking the hand of a godly man, or walking into the Holy land. I feel close to God because Christ lives in me.

You foolish Colossian Christians, Paul is saying, don't you know Christ is God and He lives in you? And 2,000 years later, we're still struggling with the same problem.

verse 19

And not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.

Focus on Christ.

Verse 21

Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch, (referring to things that all perish as they are used) - according to human precepts and teachings? These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

There are people who love all these things, it gives an appearance of wisdom. They want to look special -they went to the Holy Land, they shook the hand of this faith healer. All this is the appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion. And for some, it is the severity to the body-how much they suffered to get closer to God.

But they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh. You want to overcome your sins? You want to feel closer to God? Remember Christ, focus on Christ! All the other things have no value.

Chapter Three is quite similar in many ways to what you read in Ephesians. And I'll explain that in a while.

Chapter 3:1

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

A reminder again, Christ is God. Christ is God. The Trinity. Christ and God are really just One.

Chapter 3:5-17 This passage is very similar to Ephesians - put on, put off. Put off your old habits so that you can put on new habits, new way of life. The old ways are your selfish, self-indulgent ways, sinful ways. Now you put on Christ, which is not selfish, but always thinking of others, is not indulgent, is sacrificial, is not grabbing, it's giving. It's not showy, it's gentle. It's patient.

For many people the old habits are still there. Christianity today and Colossian times - no change!

Chapter 3:18 up to chapter 4:1 is about family

What's Paul telling the Colossian Christians? At home, how are you?

You know a really a good Christian, not by how he looks on Sunday, but how is he at home. What's a good Christian woman? How she submits to her husband as unto the Lord. How's a good Christian man, how does he love his wife as Christ loved the church. That's endurance every day, every day! 24/7. Anybody can act for a while, doesn't take a challenge. Once a week, everyone can put on an act. Mission trip, anybody can put an act. But everyday? You need Christ. So that's why in Ephesians and Colossians, a major section is on the family -to live out Christ first in your homes.

Chapter 4:3-4

At the same time, pray also for us that God may open to us a door for the word to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison--that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.

Paul is asking please pray for me, that I'll have a chance to share the Word in prison. Now of course, he has a chance, to the guards who come, and occasional visitors.

But you know what he says? That I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.

I wish you will pray for me, and you will pray for your pastors, that when we speak the Word, we will be clear. You know, I feel that a lot of times, most of us preachers and pastors cannot be clear, because nobody prays for us. We need prayer.

Chapter 4:9 tells us of an interesting person.

And with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother who is one of you. They will tell you everything that has taken place here.

Later when you read Philemon, you will find Onesimus, a runaway slave from Colosse. He ran to the big city, and he heard the gospel from Paul, got saved, and Paul told him to go back to his master, Philemon.

So what's this whole book about?

This whole book is about us. We may have all the doctrines in our head, but it's very hard for us to grasp the truth. The transcendence of God... so high, so lofty, so amazing, beyond grasp, and yet, this amazing God has chosen to dwell with us. And He's right here. If you're a believer, and you have received Jesus as your Savior, Jesus has bridged the gap between

you and the transcendent God, because Jesus rose from the dead, and sent His Holy Spirit into your heart.

Christ lives in us in the person of His Holy Spirit. And Christ wants to live through us. We are to reflect Him, we are to be ambassadors for Him, that we will bring Christ into the world. And that transcendent God may be seen in our lives. And that others may also experience the transcendence and imminence of God. There's no other God, like our God.

How many Christians have fully even thought about this? This is what Colossians is about- Christ is God. And Christ walked among us and Christ lives in us.

May God bless you with this amazing truth. May you love this amazing God who cannot be fully understood, but must be loved.

God bless you.