

## INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY OF

# Colossians

Twelfth book of the New Testament, between Philippians and Thessalonians; written about 60 A.D. by Paul the prisoner (1:1; 4:18) to the church in Colosse (1:2), a city in Asia Minor

The church in Colosse was . . .

- a church Paul did not know personally (2:1)
- visited by Epaphras on Paul's behalf (1:7, 8; 4:12, 13)
- a twin church to Laodicea (2:1; 4:13-16)
- threatened by false teachers (2:4, 8, 16, 18)

The Colossian letter . . .

- promotes the deity of Christ and His superiority over every competitor in the marketplace of ideas (1:15-19; 2:8-23)
- contains several classic passages: a hymn to Christ (1:13-18); a centerpiece (3:1-4); and a description of the beautiful life (3:12-17)
- has a literary twin: over 50 of its 95 verses are mirrored in the words and message of the epistle to the Ephesians
- easily divides into theological (chs. 1, 2) and practical (chs. 3, 4) sections

## First half (chs. 1, 2)

- The content is doctrinal: It teaches revealed truth regarding the nature and work of Christ (Christology) and His salvation (soteriology).
- The tone is polemic: It argues against the false teachings of those who pollute the truth and defends the gospel from their attacks of legalism and mysticism.
- The mood is indicative: It declares facts about the crucified-and-risen Christ and who we are in faith-relation to Him. Examples: "You are [were] complete . . . dead . . . buried . . . raised . . . hidden . . . in Him" (2:10-13; 3:1, 3).

## Second half (chs. 3, 4)

- The content is practical: It instructs regarding the lifestyle of those who are the holy, elect, and beloved people of God (3:12).
- The tone is irenic: It exudes peace and love toward its readers; the writer blesses them with many personal greetings and a benediction of grace (3:15; 4:7-18).
- The mood is imperative: It requires those who believe in Christ to live in purity, peace, and love. Examples: Put off evil (3:5-9); put on good (3:12-17); submit . . . love . . . obey . . . don't provoke . . . give . . . pray . . . walk . . . speak (3:18—4:6).

These halves are twice condensed into single verses:

"As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him" (2:6).  
 "If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above" (3:1).

## Mystery and glory of the gospel

Christ is the bodily image of God's fullness. He created and sustains the universe. He redeemed and reconciled us to God by His death on the cross. With us in Him and He in us, we'll be perfect in God's sight as long as we continue in this faith. Christ is all-sufficient (1:11-29; 2:1-3, 9-15; 3:11)!

## Interference with the gospel

Some semi-Christian teachers (pre-gnostics) were evidently attempting to infect the church with their human philosophies and traditions (2:8). They taught allegiance to pseudo-spiritual principalities, powers, and angels; they urged obedience to worldly principles and doctrines of asceticism (2:15, 18, 20-23). The result was a toxic mixture of legalism and mysticism that boasted Jewish, Christian, and Greek elements.

## Debated questions

- What was nailed to the cross (2:14)? Was it the IOU—our sin debt—that every repentant soul admits before God? Was it some portion of the Torah? Was it the entire law when viewed as an instrument of condemnation over those who are now in Christ?
- What is the meaning of 2:16, 17? Do "food, drink, festival, new moon, and sabbaths" refer to Hebrew practices or to their mixture with pagan, pre-Gnostic elements? Do these practices rise and fall together, or may they be distinguished for some purposes? Does "let no one judge you" offer freedom to continue these practices without fear of condemnation? Does *are* (v. 17) suggest that final fulfillment for some "shadow" practices is yet future and the practice is therefore valid?

**Colossians in a sentence:** To avoid being cheated and judged by others' self-imposed regulations and additions to the gospel, Christians must hold fast to the preeminent, redeeming Christ alone, while they are recreated in His image by putting on the fruits of holiness.