

Books of the Bible Series

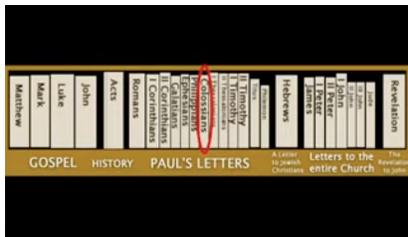
Colossians

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Today completes our series of the books of the Bible for this summer. We started with the Book of John and continued to Acts, Romans, I & II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians (today). .

In between the Gospels (Jesus's ministry)/Acts (the formation of the church) and Revelation (the end of all things), there are various other books written by several authors.



Paul wrote the most followed by Peter, James, John, Jude, and an unknown author of Hebrews. Books are first arranged by author, then audience, then length. It's kind of a weird organization. For example, the letters from Paul to the churches are followed by his letters to individuals. The Book of Colossians is just a little shorter than Ephesians. The shortest letter he wrote to an individual was Philemon, which we will touch on today.

Paul was currently in jail when he wrote the letter to Colossae but we're not sure where he was. It might be Rome (the traditional view) or maybe in Ephesus (over an incident not found in Acts).

It is commonly thought that Paul wrote Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, and Philippians and potentially I and II Timothy from Rome when he was under house arrest. This would put the date from 59-67 AD. I lean toward the earlier edge of that because of an earthquake that we know happened at Colossae which he doesn't mention (and I would think he would have).

Colossians is a good book to memorize: It gives you all you need in terms of instructions and theology. In fact, I think I will try to **memorize** it as we are going to continue with an in-depth study of Colossians on Sunday mornings for the next couple of months. **Do you want to join me?**

My Opening Question:

If you had \$10 million, what would you do? If you now had everything you needed, how would you live? Think about this.



I love maps: Where is Colossae? It's not labeled on the maps here because Paul probably **never went there** on his missionary journeys. .





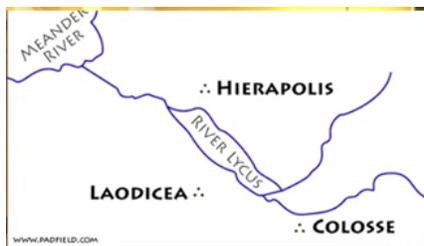
You should be able to recognize many of the churches that have letters written to them on the map to the left. **Notice Colossae is close to Laodicea and Hierapolis.** The distance from Ephesus to Colossae is basically 100 miles or the distance from Tucson to Phoenix, about a 2-or 3-day walk.

There is a river valley that would take you through Ladocicea but if you went on the mail route, you would go through Philadelphia. Each of these had a church. Colossae is only 6-9 miles from Laodicea and Hierapolis. You could walk this distance later today. There are some really cool hot springs in Hierapolis. The water in Colossae is cold but when it mixes with Hierapolis water, it ends up in Laodicea as lukewarm.



In the photograph of Colossae below, you can see it's largely un-excavated. It's a lot of dirt and grass and was never dug up like other places. The reason is

because it was small and no one really cared about it at the time when Paul wrote his letter to them. Laodicea, however, was a much bigger, more important city.



The Book of Acts has some further details of Colossae in Act 19:10. See if you notice it!

Acts 19: 10 This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord.

Did you catch it? No! It's not mentioned! Colossae is just a small town and isn't even mentioned directly in Acts but this verse is referring to the area of Asia where they were. Word got out and these people probably heard about the places close to them.

WHO wrote this letter? Paul and Timothy (the one Paul was training) wrote to the believers Colossae along with people mentioned at the end: Aristarchus, Mark (different from other Marks, a cousin of Barnabas), Epaphras, Luke, and Demas.

I listened to a video from Bible Project <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/colossians/> about seven times yesterday while I was traveling to/from Phoenix. In the video, they said **“Colossians was written to a group of people Paul had never met who made up a church he didn't start.”** Someone else besides Paul started this church, probably from hearing Paul in nearby places like Ephesus. We think that news got to Paul through Epaphras:

Col 1:7 You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, **8** and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.

Later in the letter he tells more about Epaphras:

Col 4:9 For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, **10** so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God **11** being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, **12** and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. **13** For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves,

Paul also mentions a letter to Laodicea...which we don't have (*or do we?*). This letter is being read in Laodicea and he wants them to swap letters when they are done reading his letter to the Colossians.

Col 4:16 After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea.

The hint that we might have this letter today is centered on this passage in Chapter 4:

Col 4:7 Tychicus will tell you all the news about me. He is a dear brother, a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. **8** I am sending him to you for the express purpose that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts. **9** He is coming with Onesimus, our faithful and dear brother, who is one of you. They will tell you everything that is happening here.

Tychicus is the guy who has the letter which will explain further information about Paul et al. Actually, Ephesians, Colossians, and Philmon are all tied together: I think Tychicus carried all three letters. (The Letter of Philemon explains what was going on with Onesimus to his slave owner, Philemon.)

Philemon 1 Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother,
To Philemon our dear friend and fellow worker—

Philemon 23 Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you greetings. **24** And so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my fellow workers.

My theory is that Paul sent Tychicus to carry all three letters when he and Onesimus traveled to Colossae through Laodicia to Ephesus. Remember from the maps that going from Colossae to Ephesus leads through Laodicea. Because Ephesians was meant to be a circular letter, Titichus would stop and read this letter to churches along the way. If a church had a scribe to make a copy, they could keep it. I think that Ephesus was one of those places...and I think that is the letter the Laodicians had!

Ephesians and Colossians are very similar, sometimes even word for word. A difference is that Paul didn't have greetings in the Ephesians letter or the personal information included Colossians. You can ask me more questions about this if you want!

Colossians is an epistle which is a LETTER written in a formal, common style at that time. Today, we have also such style templates: where we put the address on an envelope, where we put the salutation, how we close a letter, etc.

The standard template for letter at that time was:

- Greetings which include the **writer's name**.
- A note of **thanksgiving**. "I'm happy I know you, I'm thankful things are going well for you." This was very common.
- Prayer (Even in nonChristian letters, a prayer was common.)
- Main content
- Final Greetings, name signing to authenticate the letter. Rather than a return address, they said who was carrying the letter. This was a way to find out how to get back to them.

Structure of all of Paul's letters, including Colossians

- Greeting
- Thanksgiving
- Prayer
- Theology Context
- Ethical Content (the way that you should live)
- Final Greetings

My highlights for Colossae:

1. Who Jesus is (Col 1:15-20)

Col 1:15 The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. **16** For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. **17** He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. **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. **19** For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, **20** and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.



I couldn't get the ways we use the word "supreme" out of my head:



A regular taco and a taco supreme

And here are the Supremes:



Here are air superiority fighters! And above is the highest, most imp't Supreme Court

Likewise, Christ is the supreme creator, authority, and truth: he contains all knowledge and mystery. He will shoot down all other fighters. Colossians 1 tells us who Jesus is and is maybe the most all encompassing and loftiest description of Jesus in the whole Bible! (Almost like John 1:1.)

2. Who you are (Col 1:21-23)

Col 1: 21 Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of^[a] your evil behavior. **22** But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation— **23** if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

Through Christ's death, we are the payment of his blood; we are reconciled to God. If two people are estranged and brought back together into a harmonious relationship, this is reconciliation. We were enemies in our hearts because of our evil behavior: **This is why it makes this a good book to memorize!** *This is the fullness of the gospel! We were enemies, alienated and evil...but through Jesus and his supremacy, God reconciled us, holy, pure, forgiven.* This is a life-changing message.

3. Avoid These (Col 2:8, 20-23)

Col 1:8 See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ.

You can think of this kind of deception as *Jesus+* (*Jesus Plus*): the idea is that Jesus is good and supreme BUT if you want to be really holy, there are some mysteries from angelic beings that I should explain to you. This is the secret knowledge that will make you even more right with God

OR

Jesus is good and all but you should still follow the law if you want to be more holy and special and loved by God.

Is **Jesus EXTRA** even better? NO! Paul says to avoid this!

Col 1:20 Since you died with Christ to the elemental spiritual forces of this world, why, as though you still belonged to the world, do you submit to its rules: **21** "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"? **22** These rules, which have to do with things that are all destined to perish

with use, are based on merely 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.

I like Richard Foster, author of Celebration of Discipline. He says *self-imposed worship* is *WILL worship*: This means it looks wise but it doesn't work. Bad habits will tell you this: imposing strict rules on myself doesn't work for long. I may vow to NO MORE SNACKING! We use **our will power** to break our bad habits. Addictions are effectively treated in 12-step programs because the first rules state you are powerless to do this anyways! You won't make it and it won't work. You cannot handle this by yourself. Even worse, even if it works, it doesn't work! Who gets the credit if you break your own habit? YOU get the credit. You believe you are better than all the other people who could not figure it out. I'm more diligent, etc. and this leads to pride which, of course, comes before the fall. This sets me up for the next thing that I also have no power over and I fall hard.

Rather, we should live as slaves. This is bizarre the way Paul says to live:

Col. 3:22 Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to curry their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. **23** Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, **24** since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. **25** Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for their wrongs, and there is no favoritism.

You hear many people recite **Col 3:23: Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart**. But it's often pulled out of context: Notice that this is really talking about being slaves with a different attitude. Remember, Paul 's saying that Onesimus should go back into slavery! However, what is your expectation when you hear that Christ has set you free? THE END of slavery, of course!! Christ sets us free! But that is not what Paul actually says to Onesimus or the slaves in Colossians. I find this challenging and difficult:

Paul's example:

Col 1:24 Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.

Paul says if there is anything lacking, he will go through it for the sake of the church because this message is so important.

Earlier this year, I spoke on a part of Philippians that I like least: ***Where we meet Jesus most is in the midst of our suffering.*** As I think about working for Jesus while working as a slave, I have these questions:

1. Where do you feel most like a slave in your life?
2. Where are you suffering?
3. Is Jesus enough?

What would you do differently if you had \$10 million? I think Paul would keep doing what he was doing.