

## Introduction to Colossians / Philemon

It is a wonderful privilege for me to introduce our study of Paul's letter to the Colossians, also the letter to his friend, Philemon. What a wonderful hope lives within us! This is the theme of the letter – Christ in you the hope of glory! I am Helen Owens.

It is interesting to compare the book of Colossians with Paul's letter to the Ephesians.

They do complement each other in many ways. Ephesians emphasises the church as the body of Christ, while Colossians emphasises the head of the church, the Lord Jesus Christ. The church receives its life and power from Christ so that He may live through each member. This epistle focuses on Jesus Himself!

The great artist, Leonardo Da Vinci dedicated three years to painting 'The Last Supper'. He was determined that it would be his crowning work. Before the unveiling he decided to show it to a friend, for whose opinion he had the utmost respect. The friends praise was unbounded. "Oh, the cup in Jesus' hand", he said, "it is exceptionally beautiful!" Feeling extremely disappointed, Da Vinci immediately began to paint out the cup.

Astonished, the distinguished friend asked for an explanation. Da Vinci explained – "Nothing, absolutely nothing must detract from the Christ!" Da Vinci focussed attention solely on Jesus by removing the distraction of the cup. Yes, we need to see Jesus, and Jesus alone!

The Apostle Paul wrote this letter to the church at Colossae around AD 62 while he was a prisoner in Rome. He begins his letter with his greetings and then goes straight into a beautiful prayer. Chapters 1 & 2 relate to doctrine; that Jesus Christ is the glue of the universe, and once we were alienated from God, but because of Jesus and what He has accomplished we have been brought into right relationship with Him. Chapters 3 & 4 relate to practice. These chapters show us how we are to live in the light of this wonderful teaching.

Colossae was about 160 klms east of Ephesus. It was probably in the missionary expansion of the Ephesian Church that the church at Colossae was established. It was quite a young church, only about 5 – 7 years old. Paul had never been to Colossae, and it was most likely that Epaphrus started the church during the three years that Paul was in Ephesus.

False teachers had confused the young believers at Colossae. They were denigrating the deity of Jesus, teaching that He was not actually God! Paul's approach to solving this problem was not an outright attack on the false teachers, but he attacked their teaching. How did Paul do that?

By exalting Jesus Christ and showing His supremacy in all things – then he could continue to show that the false teaching was incorrect. Firstly, he established truth, then he pointed out error. He did not talk about behaviour until he had given them correct doctrine. What we believe does determine how we live and how we behave.

I heard a story once of a plane that was involved in some kind of combat. A group of soldiers were on board.

Suddenly it was discovered that there was a rat on board as well.

Now a rat could chew at the electrical wires and everything could just cut out. A rat on board meant big trouble! The Pilot sent word back to the soldiers – “There’s a rat on board! Put on your oxygen masks for we are climbing higher!” They climbed so high, that the rat had no oxygen.

You see, every time Paul came across false teaching, he lifted the people higher and higher by preaching and exalting Jesus as the preeminent one, the All-Sufficient Christ! I remember the words of a great Bible Teacher, who said – ‘a scriptural test to apply to any Christian teaching involves these questions. **Where does this belief place Jesus? Is He only included in this belief, or is He the central focus of it?’** You see, the false teachers in Colossae were not really denying Jesus, but they were de-throning Him from His rightful position.

Paul’s constant prayer for them was that they would walk in a way that was pleasing to the Lord.

**Do you live your life in a way that attention is focussed on Jesus rather than yourself?**

Paul also prayed that they would be fruitful and grow in their knowledge of God with a fuller and deeper insight.

This involves a constant process of growth, and then he asks the Lord that they would be strengthened, according to His glorious power! It is so important for us to be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Paul was praying that they would experience joy no matter how difficult the circumstances were. Let us determine by His grace, that we will not only do His will just because we should, **but because we love to, that we will absolutely delight in His will.**

Having shared how he was praying for them; he then went on to show the supremacy of Jesus in every detail of their life. He speaks firstly of the supremacy of Jesus in creation; that Jesus is the image of the invisible God; that He is one with the Father and that He is God Himself.

Not only did Jesus exist before all creation, but He also created all things for His own pleasure, and He is the sustainer of all creation. For Paul writes in V17 of Chapter 1, ‘and He is before all things, and in Him all things consist’; and then in V18, ‘He is the head of the body the church: is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things He might have the pre-eminence’.

The Church as the body of Christ is a spiritual organism, not an organisation.

The only way a person can be a member of this church is through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

As the physical body cannot function without its head, so the body of Christ cannot function without Jesus Christ as head! The sum total of the divine powers and attributes of God is in Jesus! Jesus Christ indwells every believer, but it is only as the believer matures, that Christ is formed in that believer as we take on more and more of the characteristics of Jesus. Paul writes in V27 of chapter 1 of the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles

which is - CHRIST IN YOU THE HOPE OF GLORY. He not only is our life, but He is also the life in us! The Christian life begins with Christ in us and continues with our being in Christ.

In this wonderful inspiring letter, Paul accomplishes the following in the first chapter: -

V15 – He exalts Jesus as the very image of God

V16 – He exalts Jesus as the Creator

V17 – He exalts Jesus as the pre-existent sustainer of all things

V18 – He exalts Jesus as being head of the church and as being the first resurrected

V19 – He exalts Jesus as being the fullness of the Father

V20 to 22 – He exalts Jesus as being the reconciler of all. Therefore, Jesus is all we ever need!

In Chapter 2, verses 9 & 10 we read ‘for in Christ all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form, and you and I are complete in Him!’ Your view of Jesus will impact every area of your life. Our faith in Jesus should transform our lives, our relationships in our home, in our church, and in our community.

Jesus did not come to give us a lot of things apart from Himself. He did not come to earth to show us ‘a’ way – for He is THE WAY! He did not come to bring us ‘a’ life, for He is THE LIFE! He did not come to give us ‘some bread’, for HE IS THE BREAD OF LIFE!

Our position in Christ provides the life and power for complete victory. If you are ever told that you need something extra, you need to ask – “Where does your teaching put Jesus? Does it rob Him of the fullness of His deity, or does it rob Him of His humanity? Does your teaching claim that I must have some added sentimental experience, when the Bible tells me that I am complete in Christ?” There is nothing to be added to the completeness that we have in Him. Jesus alone is sufficient for all that we ever need!

Paul is deeply concerned for these believers as he realises that they were being invaded by such deception and many were falling for it. There were three different elements in this teaching – Greek philosophy and speculation, eastern mysticism and Jewish legalism all mixed up together with just a little bit of Jesus somewhere included.

The subtle thing about heresy is that Jesus is always in there plus other things, so the all sufficiency of Christ is completely lost. They were being told that to get favour with God, they had to do more, they had to work more, earn more, and learn more. How often we can fall into this trap of legalism. Commandments are not conditional to salvation; they are our response to salvation. If we put any other condition other than faith in Jesus alone, that is legalism. Sometimes we may hear that these little ‘add on’s’ are a key to receiving God’s blessings.

No, God blesses us because of Jesus – we are In Christ! Paul encourages the Colossian Christians to see Jesus as the centre of their lives, every area of their daily living.

Paul says in V3 of Chapter 2 that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden for us in Jesus Christ. The Bible is God's only record, teaching us who Jesus Christ is and what He has done. If any teaching, no matter how persuasive it may be, if it does not line up with scripture, then it is to be rejected.

Christ's Word lacks nothing, for in Jesus we have everything!

With the mixture of legalism, mysticism, philosophy, and the ideas of man, we can see similar philosophies today for this heresy is much like the New Age Teaching, and very sadly this kind of thing is creeping into the church. Christian life today can sometimes be seen to be more and more subjected to our experiences and feelings instead of having ourselves firmly on the solid word of the scriptures. Look at V19 of Chapter 2. We read here that they had lost connection with the 'head', with Jesus, from whom the whole body is supported and held together and grows as God causes it to grow! So, there it is! We must hold fast to Jesus and to His Word!

In Chapters 3 & 4 Paul shows how the truths of Chapters 1 & 2 are to be worked out in our lives, and that in Christ we have the power for all that we need. The process of sanctification means becoming more and more like Jesus; for when a child of God looks into the Word of God and there sees the Son of God, we are then changed by the Holy Spirit of God into the image of the Lord Jesus, all for the glory of God!

Yes, Christ is all in all! Jesus is above all powers and authorities, and He is all we need for we are complete in Him, then His Word should make such a difference in our lives when we are faced with difficult situations, when we have tough decisions. As we go through our study in Colossians, these wonderful truths will encourage us in our daily walk with Jesus!

The book of Philemon is a practical application of Paul's teaching in Colossians.

The letter Paul wrote to Philemon was sent at the same time. Philemon was a convert and a friend of Paul, an affluent man who had a church fellowship in his home. Onesimus was a slave who belonged to Philemon. Onesimus had run away, and Paul met him in Rome, led him to salvation in Jesus, and now is sending him back to Philemon, back to his master. The hand of God in all of this is just so amazing! According to Roman law, Onesimus could have been executed for his crimes, but now he has become a Christian, he is a brother in Christ. Paul was willing to pay whatever Onesimus owed. He was willing to pay the debt for he wrote in V17 and 18 *'so if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. If he has done you any wrong, or owes you anything, charge it to me. Put it all on my account'*. Isn't that just beautiful!

It reminds me of what the Lord Jesus has done for each one of us. "He paid the debt He did not owe.... I had a debt I could not pay". I am forever grateful, so thankful that the great creator, the Lord Jesus Christ became my Saviour, took away my guilt and paid the price for me!

I am going to close with a very thoughtful poem written by Pastor Jim May, taken from his book, "Living at His Place". It is quite lengthy, but I would like to leave you with a few of the verses. It is called,

**“Back to Jesus Alone”**

Whenever you can't figure out whether to:

    sit at His feet,

    walk in a manner worthy of His call

    or run the race with all diligence –

**It's time to get back to Jesus alone.....**

    When you can't remember:

    The twenty-two characteristics of a good wife,

    The seven steps of appeal to authority,

    The eight things to do when you are worried,

    Or the nine ways of love,

**It's time to get back to Jesus alone.....**

    When the proof of authority is simply “they say”:

    “Have more faith, just trust more, let go and let God”,

    “Just find the sin and repent”,

    “Just love, have joy, receive peace, and pray”,

    and you can't figure out who “they” are,

**It's time to get back to Jesus alone.....**

    When some Preacher or Teacher says:

        “Hear the Word”

        “Read the Word”

        “Memorise the Word”

        “Study the Word”

        “Meditate on the Word”,

    and you are lost in the middle of Leviticus or Lamentations,

    and even Luke is just too much,

**It's time to get back to Jesus alone.....**

    When you hear:

    Have faith, work hard, repent, conquer, tithe,

    Give, suffer, evangelise, make disciples,

    Wait on Him, walk in Him, pick up your cross,

    Claim your possessions,

    Pray and fast,

    And you feel pulled in 16 different directions on a rack,

**It's time to get back to Jesus alone.....**

When you've been through the circuit and you've heard and watched preachers preach:

Exercise faith, build ministries, movements, and monuments,

Pray, praise, teach on power, signs, and wonders,

Laugh, cry, dance,

Prance, motivate, manipulate,

And you just can't stand any more,

**It's time to get back to Jesus alone.....**

When you hear about, and go to another conference that promises to 'be it':

And you went, listened, prayed, paid, bought the books and CDs,

tried it, and it didn't work,

and the preacher left town and you're left wondering why it didn't work,

so 'what's wrong with me'?

**It's time to get back to Jesus alone.....**

It is time to hear His voice,

It is time to seek His kingdom,

It is time to simplify,

It is time to love Him with all of our mind, our soul our heart and our strength,

It is time to commune with Him alone in the secret place,

It is time my dear friends, to get back to Jesus alone!

It is my prayer that we will live this truth every day!

So, as we do this study, may we all come with an open heart for His Word.

Press into Jesus! Love and serve Him for who He is!

Know Him in His all sufficiency and may we all gain a greater understanding of what is meant by -

"Christ in you, the hope of glory"!

Amen.