



COLOSSIANS
THE SUPREMACY OF JESUS

A COMPANION GUIDE

¹⁵He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.
¹⁶For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.
¹⁷And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.
¹⁸And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. ¹⁹For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

Colossians 1: 15-20, ESV

Contents

INTRODUCTION	4
COLOSSIANS OUTLINE	5
AUTHOR, DATE & DESTINATION	6
AUTHORSHIP	6
DATE & PLACE OF WRITING	6
TO THE CHURCH IN COLOSSAE	7
KEY CONCEPTS & THEMES	9
“IN CHRIST”	9
UNDERSTANDING & KNOWLEDGE	9
SUBSTANCE & FULLNESS	10
PRACTICAL TAKEAWAYS	12

1.

INTRODUCTION

“²⁸Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. ²⁹For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

Colossians 1: 28-29, ESV

Few other books in the New Testament give as clear a picture of the supremacy of Jesus as does the book of Colossians: Jesus is creator and Lord over all things, the fullness of God through whom all of creation is reconciled to the Father.

As a result, we’re called to continue to walk in Him *alone* so that we don’t get caught up in empty religious practices and deceptive philosophies but to live as new person; putting off what is old and worldly and putting on the virtues that come from our new nature in Christ – which includes living in humble submission to one another for the sake of Jesus.

In today’s modern culture there are still tons of distractions and competing philosophies that could tempt us to focus on the wrong things or get pulled into going through empty religious practice while missing what is most important: living wholeheartedly for Jesus and keeping Him at the centre *and* pre-eminent position of our lives.

The aim of this companion guide is to give you some additional insight into the book of Colossians, as a complement to our preaching series at Linkway Church, with information you would typically find in Bible commentaries and other study resources. Like the Apostle Paul, our prayer is that you would become more **mature** in Jesus, growing in your knowledge & understanding of Him – and living differently as a result.

As you keep reading this brief companion guide, you’ll get a sense of **who** wrote this letter, **when**, and under what circumstances. We’ll cover some **key concepts & themes** that are important in this letter, and conclude with some **practical takeaways**.

Our encouragement is that, as you listen to our preached series and read through the entire book of Colossians on your own, you’ll take note of particular things that the Holy Spirit is saying specifically to *you* and respond accordingly!

2.

COLOSSIANS OUTLINE

Although there are different ways to break up the book of Colossians, the outline below gives a good birds-eye view of the letter as a whole:

- I. Personal Greeting (1: 1-2)**
- II. Thanksgiving (1: 3-8)**
- III. Prayer & Reminder (1: 9-14)**
 - a. Paul's prayer: growing in the knowledge of the Lord (1: 9-12a)*
 - b. Paul's prayer: a reminder of God's salvation work (1: 12b-14)*
- IV. The Supremacy of Jesus (1: 15-23)**
 - a. Jesus is Lord of creation (1: 15-17)*
 - b. Jesus is Lord of redemption – for all things (1: 18-20)*
 - c. Jesus is Lord of redemption – for the Colossians personally (1: 21-23)*
- V. Paul's Ministry (1:24 – 2:3)**
 - a. Suffering for the mystery of the Gospel (1: 24-29)*
 - b. His struggle for the Colossians (2: 1-3)*
- VI. Dangerous & Distracting Teaching (2: 4-23)**
 - a. Paul's warning about poisonous influences & arguments – stand firm in Christ! (2: 4-8)*
 - b. The antidote: Jesus and our standing in Him (2: 9-15)*
 - c. Practical outworkings of this false teaching: foods, empty worship, pride (2: 16-23)*
- VII. Our New Life In Christ (3:1 – 4:6)**
 - a. A call to focus on Jesus (3: 1-4)*
 - b. Put off the old, earthly life & its identity (3: 5-11)*
 - c. Put on the virtues of your new life (3: 12-17)*
 - d. A new way of doing relationships (3:18 – 4:1)*
 - e. Prayer & acting in wisdom at all times (4: 2-6)*
- VIII. Final Personal Greetings & Conclusion (4: 7-18)**
 - a. The messengers carrying the letter (4: 7-9)*
 - b. Greetings from Paul's friends (4: 10-14)*
 - c. Greetings to other Christians in the area (4: 15-17)*
 - d. Personal sign off and word of grace (4:18)*



3.

AUTHOR, DATE & DESTINATION

¹Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, ²To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae.

^{4:18}I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.

Colossians 1: 1-2; 4:18, ESV

AUTHORSHIP

We can have every confidence that the Apostle Paul is the author of this letter, and that he had the help of Timothy as a scribe or secretary (referred to as an ‘amanuensis’ – a common practice in those days; much like modern secretaries might take down dictated notes) in putting his words to parchment.

The letter indicates that at least the final verse (and potentially some of the words of greeting before it) were physically written by Paul’s hand – a personal touch, which also helps to authenticate the letter in its original form. The personal greetings to people known by Paul further show off his care & familiarity with the recipients, and there are many points of similarity in this letter and in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians.

The letter to the Colossians, along with Ephesians and Philippians, were sent with Tychicus and Onesimus (compare Ephesians 6:21 and Colossians 4: 7-9) who would also carry word of how things were going with Paul in prison.

DATE & PLACE OF WRITING

In 4:3, Paul mentions explicitly that he is ‘in prison’ (or ‘in chains’ as in some other translations). Since Paul was in prison *multiple* times because of his faith in Jesus and proclamation of the Gospel, this reference could point to times of incarceration in Ephesus, Caesarea or Rome – or even somewhere else. While we could go into much detail and discussion on the *exact* location of his imprisonment, and the impact this has on the *date* of his writing, it was most likely written either from Ephesus in the early to mid A.D. 50’s or Rome in roughly A.D. 62.

During much of Paul’s various imprisonments, he had the freedom to write & send letters, receive visitors or even converse with household guards.



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The Setting of Colossians

c. A.D. 62

Paul wrote his letter to the Colossians during a time of imprisonment, probably in Rome. The church at Colossae was likely established during Paul's third missionary journey as he ministered for three years in Ephesus. It appears that Paul did not personally establish the church there, but instead a Colossian named Epaphras traveled to Ephesus, responded to Paul's gospel message, and returned to share the good news in Colossae.

TO THE CHURCH IN COLOSSAE

One of Paul's shortest letters, his words to the Colossian believers are written to strengthen this young church, which sprang up as a result of the proclamation of the Gospel by Epaphras, who himself came to faith in Jesus after responding to Paul's preaching! Epaphras, who was from Colossae, likely became a Christian in Ephesus while Paul was ministering there (A.D. 52-55), and then returned home to preach the gospel himself, from which the church in Colossian was born (see 1:7).

At the time of writing, Epaphras was with Paul – visiting him in prison – and it would seem likely that Epaphras was sharing his concerns for the church with Paul, asking for advice and direction from his father in the faith on how to combat dangerous teachings and deceptive philosophies threatening to derail the congregation.

¹²Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God.

Colossians 4:12, ESV

As we can see from the words above, Epaphras longed for the Colossian believers to be mature in their faith, and certain of the will of God for their lives in the face of destructive & tempting false teaching. While it is difficult to say *exactly* what this false teaching was or where it originated from, it fits the context for it to be of Jewish influence (insisting on keeping Jewish festivals and rituals and fascination with angels – calling on them for protection against evil spirits). We can certainly see elements of paganism

as well, which commonly included practicing rites & rituals to ward off evil spirits and physical affliction. Regardless, as a result, the Colossian believers needed to be challenged to focus on Jesus, growing in the knowledge of God's will in wisdom & understanding (see 1: 9-10) so that they would live lives pleasing to Him, remaining steadfast & firm in their trust of the Gospel message (see 1:23). All of the 'mystery' or 'hidden knowledge' they would ever need can be found in *Jesus* – not in practicing rituals (or any other 'human traditions'), or being pre-occupied with visions & angels.

Just like the Colossian church back then, in our modern context we must be careful as followers of Jesus not to pursue the 'shadow' when He is the *substance*. (See 2:17)

4.

KEY CONCEPTS & THEMES

Here are a few things in this letter to keep an eye out for as recurring themes and concepts in this brief letter:

“IN CHRIST”

Because the Colossian believers were being tempted to give in to an attractive (yet, heretical) teaching that would pull them *away* from simple dependence on Jesus for their salvation and protection, Paul reminds them of their standing in Christ – what He’s achieved for them, and all the benefits that come from their new identity in Him. Because we are ‘in Christ’ we enjoy union and relationship with Him, and are intimately involved in & have participated in His death on the cross, His resurrection from the dead, new life in Him and fullness that comes only from being ‘in Him.’ We see this repeated in various ways throughout the letter, with rich truths for us to cherish!

- Our *faith* is in Christ Jesus (1:4 // 2:5)
- We have *redemption* in Jesus, the Son (1:14)
- All created things are held together in Jesus (1:17)
- All the *fullness* of God dwells in Jesus (1:19 // 2:9)
- We are reconciled in His body; through His death (1:22)
- Christ is in *us*, our hope of glory and we have *fullness* in Him (1:27 // 2:10)
- All treasures of *wisdom & knowledge* are hidden in Jesus (2:3)
- We *walk* in Jesus and are *built up* in Him (2: 6-7)
- We’re made *alive* together with Jesus and *raised* with Jesus (2:13 // 3:1)
- Our life is securely hidden with Christ (3:3)
- Christ is all and in all (3:11)
- Do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus (3: 17,23)

UNDERSTANDING & KNOWLEDGE

The believers in Colossae have need of *maturity* in their faith, so that they’re not drawn away into ways of thinking (and living) that are not Gospel-centric. Without a deeper understanding of the Gospel, and growing maturity of the knowledge of Christ, these young believers could easily start following man-made traditions and strict rules about eating, drinking and the following of religious festivals. Because of their response to the Gospel, and believing that salvation and, consequently, justification (being ‘made

right' with God; having a righteous standing before Him) is by **grace** (1:6), they are now qualified by the Father to share in the inheritance 'of the saints in light' (1:12). This is the only 'mystery' that the Colossians need to concern themselves with; only seeking Jesus will yield deeper understanding & knowledge – not some mystical practice, revelation from angels or elemental spirits.

⁶Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, ⁷rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. ⁸See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.

Colossians 2: 6-8, ESV

Maturity comes as we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, seeking both to *know* Him more – which is possible because of our union with Him – and to *live* for Him (to 'walk in Him'). This involves actively getting rid of ('putting to death' is Paul's wording in 3:5) that which is part of our old lives in the domain of darkness (see 1:13 and 3: 5-11):

- Sexual immorality, impurity, wrong passions, evil desires, covetousness
- Anger, malice, wrath, slander/gossip and other unclean ways of talking
- Finding identity in our nationality or social standing

And we don't just *get rid* of these things; we now instead live out the characteristics (or virtues) that identify us as God's chosen people:

- Compassion, kindness, humility, meekness & patience
- Forgiveness, like Jesus forgives.
- Deep love for God and others
- Letting peace rule in our lives
- Being filled with Jesus' words, so that we can pour into others

So, **maturity** isn't just a case of knowledge & understanding only; true knowledge and understanding result in a changed way of *living*.

SUBSTANCE & FULLNESS

The idea of 'fullness' and being 'filled' come up multiple times in this letter:

- Paul prays that the Colossians will be *filled* with the knowledge of God's will (1:9)
- The *fullness* of God dwells in Jesus; the fullness of deity is bodily seen in Jesus (1:19 // 2:9)
- Paul is being *filled up* with affliction of his body as he suffers for the church (1:24)



- Believers coming to *full* assurance in their knowledge and understanding (2:2)
- We have been *filled* in Jesus (2:10)

Paul makes it clear that Jesus is completely, fully and *visibly* God – He has made the invisible God known to us! We can read something similar to this in the book of Hebrews:

³He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature...
Hebrews 1:3, ESV

There is nothing more important in life that we can know than this fact! Jesus didn't just *seem* to be God; He was and is Lord. There is no need to pursue anyone or anything else, and the mystery of our faith is that *all* of the fullness of God, which dwells in Jesus and **is** Jesus, now dwells in *us*; which gives us *fullness* and 'complete-ness.' Part of the reason that the deceptive teaching creeping into the Colossian church was so dangerous is that some of it had the *appearance* of wisdom; there seemed to be a grain of truth in it all – surely abstaining from certain foods, or following Jewish festivals and customs was a *good* thing? This becomes deadly because the 'real thing,' the *substance* is only found in Jesus. When external religious practices (or pagan pursuits) erode the foundation that only Jesus can give, deceiving people into thinking that righteousness must be *earned* or that spiritual victory and protection comes from somewhere *other* than Jesus Christ, it must be swiftly dealt with.

When it comes particularly to Jewish customs, and the temptation for contemporary Christians to put on the trappings of Old Testament ritual and festival celebrations, it is necessary to be reminded that those things were only the **shadow** – they were meant to point to the *real thing*, the **substance**, which is Jesus. Now that Jesus has in fact come, we don't have to settle for the shadow – and in fact, it is dangerous to do so!

5 They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things.
Hebrews 8:5, ESV

Ask yourself frequently: "Am I pursuing or being satisfied by the 'shadow' or do I want the 'substance?'"

¹For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near.
Hebrews 10:1, ESV



5.

PRACTICAL TAKEAWAYS

As we talked about earlier, **maturity** in Christ is more than just *knowledge* or *understanding* – there must be an impact on the way we *live* and become more like Jesus. Here are a few questions for you to consider, as well as an opportunity to reflect on what has stood out to you from each chapter of this magnificent letter, and the series that has been preached at Linkway.

1. *Can you confidently say that you have believed the Gospel? What kind of fruit has resulted in your life?*
2. *If you examine your prayer life, what do you pray for most frequently?*
3. *How does Colossians 1: 15-20 help you to appreciate Jesus more? What have you learnt about Him throughout the course of this book?*
4. *Has anyone ever challenged you on practices or pursuits you've added to your faith that aren't Biblical?*
5. *What makes you 'right' with God, and how can you become more mature in Jesus?*
6. *How are you doing in "putting to death" the following things? Which of them are you currently most vulnerable to?*
 - **Sexual immorality** (anything ranging from sexual activity before or outside of marriage, lust, pornography to homosexual acts or anything in between)
 - **Impurity**
 - **Wrong passion**
 - **Evil desires**
 - **Covetousness/jealousy**
 - **Anger, wrath or malice**
 - **Slander/gossip**
 - **Obscene or unhealthy speech**
 - **Lying**



7. Which of the following virtues are you most lacking and need to 'put on?'

- **Compassion**
- **Kindness**
- **Humility**
- **Meekness**
- **Patience**
- **Forgiveness**

8. If you consider your place of employment, what would it look like to 'work heartily for the Lord and not for men?'

> Write down any verse from Colossians chapter 1 that stood out to you and why, along with anything impactful from the 1st preached message:

> Write down any verse from Colossians chapter 2 that stood out to you and why, along with anything impactful from the 2nd preached message:



> Write down any verse from Colossians chapter 3 that stood out to you and why, along with anything impactful from the 3rd preached message:

> Write down any verse from Colossians chapter 4 that stood out to you and why, along with anything impactful from the 4th preached message:

> From the final preached message, or series as a whole, write down anything you felt was from the Spirit specifically for you, and what you will do about it.

